

THE BARREN
FIG TREES
DOOM.

O R,

A Brief DISCOURSE wherein is set forth
the woful Danger of all who abide Un-
fruitful under GOSPEL-PRIVILEGES,
and GODS HUSBANDRY.

Being the Substance of Sixteen

SERMONS

Preached on Christ's Parable of the
FIG-TREE.

By Samuel Willard, Teacher of a Church
in BOSTON.

Mat. 3. 10. *And now the Ax is laid to the root
of the trees : therefore every tree which bring-
eth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and
cast into the fire.*

Boston, Printed by Benjamin Harris, and
John Allen. 1695. Price Bound 2s 6d.





THE
EPISTLE
TO THE
READER

Christian Reader,

IT is a vanity no less common than dangerous, for such as enjoy the Gospel, and have a relation to the Visible Church, to *boast themselves because of Gods Holy Mountain,* as if they were therefore secure from all fear of evil: supposing that the Covenant will be their safety, and saying, *though we walk in the imagination of our heart, no ill shall come upon us.* The Design of this Discourse, is to undeceive such Enfatuated Souls, by letting them see what ground they stand upon, and how dreadful the place is, in which they are. It is a singular favour of God to be raken wi hin the pale, and enjoy the benefit

The Epistle to the Reader.

of the means of grace ; but, as it may be abused, so their condition will be tremendous who shall at last fall under this guilt. That which first gave occasion to the Preaching of these Sermons, was the awful consideration of a Duty Ministerial, due to such as, being born of Professing Parents, having received the seal of Gods Covenant, and upon their asserting of this Covenant, and putting of themselves under the Discipline of Christ's Appointment, have been acknowledged, and admitted under our watch ; and must therefore be accounted for in the great Day. The thought that these should perish at last, must needs be solemn. The hazzards which they lie exposed unto of so doing are amazing. To deny them their Title to, and interest in the Gospel priviledges, seems to be to bid them go and serve other Gods ; The fear lest they should by the abuse of these aggravate their guilt and misery, cannot but fill serious souls with great solicitude : Their great addictedness to vanity, and the small discovery of their being in good earnest for Religion, looks portentously. The awful hand of God which is out against them in several terrible Judgments, is deeply affecting : and who that fears God would not do their utmost to pluck them out of the fire, and save them from burning ? These therefore are firstly concerned in this Treatise ; and it is for

The Epistle to the Reader.

for that reason commended to them in special, who are called upon to consider what terms they are upon with God, and invited with greatest solemnity to conser the rich opportunity they enjoy of obtaining Salvation, with the danger of their incurring of *double Damnation* upon their neglect; and together with thankfulness for the price that is in their hands, to *fear and tremble* lest they should lose it, for want of an heart to improve it. Nor yet are others excluded; the Heart-searching God knows who they are, that have made the highest Profession, and are for all that unsound: and such are here told what they are to expect at the hands of a *Jealous God*. Let none be so uncharitable as to suppose, that whilst we allow men their claim to the outward advantages of the Covenant, we indulge them in sin; the design is to improve it unto the more forcible perswading to diligence in securing their own salvation, and make them the more careful about it, because otherwise, the nearer to *heaven* they have been *exalted*, the deeper are they like to be detruled into *Hell*. God is wont to confer the Gospel upon men, and endow them with the liberties of it, not meerly because they are savingly converted, but that they may have the means so to be; and here they are upon termes with him, and stand Probationers for Eternal Life, or
Everlast.

The Epistle to the Reader:

Everlasting Destruction: If the following Discourses may, by the blessing of God, be made serviceable to the making Sinners in Zion afraid, and drive them from carnal confidence in that state which in it self can afford them no security, and so to give all Diligence to get under the shadow of the Everlasting Covenant, and thereby the Spiritual Kingdom of Christ may be Enlarged, and especially among the Rising and Risen Generation; I shall with all thankfulness acknowledge my Labour not to have been in vain in the Lord.

Who am

Less than the least of all Saints;

Samuel Willard.

SERMON

(1)

Luke XIII. 6, 7, 8, 9.

He spake also this Parable : A certain man had a Fig-tree planted in his Vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he to the Dresser of his Vineyard, behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none; cut it down why tumbereth it the ground.

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, & dung it. And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

SERMON I.

THE Occasion of this short and pithy Parable, is declared in the beginning of the Chapter: Our Saviour had bin (Coap. 12.) Preaching a solemn Sermon in the Audience of a Multitude; and after it, some of the company make report to him, of a bloody act of Pilate upon some Galileans: he knowing their hearts, and perceiving what improvement they made of it, in censure and not

in self-application; reflecting upon themselves as being warned hereby: he therefore instructs them in the proper use which was to be made of that and such other *Providences* as sometimes fall out, tacitly reprehending them for rash Judgment, in concluding those to have been unparallel'd Sinners: giving them to understand, that in these ways of Divine Dispensation, *The Judgments of God were unsearchable, and his ways past finding out.* That, though God sometimes makes some Sinners notable Examples of his awful Severity, even in this world; yet there are as bad as they, if not worse, spared in the day of his Patience; and that therefore the best use the *Living* can make of such Exemplary Providences, is to consider themselves, see how much they deserved it; that it was meer Sovereignty that made others and not them the Monuments of this Severity; that this was a loud call to *Repentance*, and if they did not improve it to that end, though they did now escape, yet *Ruine and Destruction* would ere-long fall upon them: and farther to set forth the great peril they were under, he subjoyns this *Parable*. It was therefore nextly referred to the present state of the *Jews*, to shew them upon what a precipice they then stood, and what danger they then lay open to, notwithstanding the present lenity they were partakers in. But, because *What is written, is written for our Instruction.* There is a profitable

ble Improvement to be made of it by us.

One Design of *Christ's Parables* is, by cloathing Spiritual Things with Earthly Language, to accommodate them the more to Humane Understandings, and to shew the rationality of them, by resembling them to such things as among men are accounted highly rational; and so to insinuate into the Affections

The scope of this *Parable* is to shew what is the true and proper standing that men have in the *Visible Church*, under all the *Privileges* therein conferred upon them. Men are apt to mistake themselves in this, and to grow secure, but *Christ* would have them to know the thing as it is. The *Parable* is only proposed, the *Reddition* is left to our Meditation, and is easily gathered from the occasion. The *Application* is nextly *personal*; for the design is to express the state of the *Fig-tree*, and not of the *Vineyard*.

The principal heads to which the matter of the *Parable* may be reduced, are these:

1. The *Subject* about which it is spoken; *A Fig-tree which a certain man had planted in his Vineyard.* *verse 6.*

2. The *barrenness* of this *Fig-tree* taken notice of particularly by the Owner, *ibid.* And he came, &c.

3. The *deliberation* of the Owner with the *Dresser* about it, *verse 7.* in which,

1. His Complaint against it; *these three years, &c.*

2. The Advice he gives to him that Dress'd it, *Cut it down why cumbereth it the ground.*

4. The Intercession of the Dresser for the fig-tree, *verse 8, 9.*

These may be spoken to in their order; and several weighty and seasonable Observations may be made upon each of them.

I. The Subject of which the Parable is spoken: *A certain man had a Fig-tree planted in his Vineyard.* The Spiritual meaning of these Parabolical Expressions is to be enquired after; and here; What is meant by the *certain man*? What by the *Vineyard*? What by the *Fig-tree*? And what by its being *planted in the Vineyard*?

1. By the *Certain Man*, is certainly intended God, being to deal with men as men, he resembleth himself to a man; and it is not limited to this or that man in particular, but expressed of any man, under such a respect; to shew that it is of universal consideration; and it is sure, that God not only challengeth a propriety in all the world as his; but more particularly in his Church, as standing under special relation to him: and therefore,

2. By the *Vineyard* we are to understand the *Visible Church*. It is not to be restrained to the Church of Gods Elect, and Effectually Called: for though his Elect do till Conversion

on abide unfruitful, yet all his called ones do bring forth fruit unto him; but here is a Tree in the Vineyard that bears none, and is supposed never so to do: I know *Grotius*, to favour his *Arminian* notions, interprets the *Vineyard* to mean the *World*, and the *Fig-tree* the Nation of the *Jews*; but, though a particular Church, is sometimes resembled by a Plant, as a *Vine*, *Psal.* 80. and an *Olive*, *Rom.* 11. and the Members of it to so many Branches; yet the *World* is no where, that I know of, called in Scripture *Gods Vineyard*, but the *Visible Church* often, *Isa.* 5. begin. 27.

3. By the *Fig-tree* we are to understand particular Professors, that are related to the *Visible Church*; for *Christ* is here speaking to men personally, upon occasion of those persons who came to such untimely ends: and it is not unusual in Scripture, to express persons severally under the notion of Plants, see *Psal.* 52. 8.

4. By its being *Planted in the Vineyard*, we are to conceive, mens enjoying of the Privileges and Benefits which are in the *Visible Church*, and *Gods* singular care expressed to them, in bestowing of these advantages on them; which, what they are, may be after considered.

I shall make some glances on this part of the Parable, it being introductory to the main Design in those things that follow:

And there are two Observations here :

DOCTRINE I.

The Visible Church is Gods Vineyard.

The Spirit of God is pleased very often to use this resemblance to express it by.

The word properly signifies a place where Vines are planted and husbanded ; but in the common usage of it, is extended to a plat for Vines, Figs, and Olives, all of which they were wont of old to Plant in their Vineyards. Men were used to have their Vineyards, and so hath God His ; that is his Visible Church : Here two things :

1. In what respect it is resembled by a Vineyard ?

2. On what account it is said to be Gods Vineyard ;

1. In what respect it is resembled by a Vineyard ?

A. To distinguish it from the rest of the World ; which is therefore compared to a Wilderness, in Opposition to the Church : and hence all those things wherein there is a difference between those two, and one is rendered

ared in a better state than the other, are here to be considered: we may in particular referr to *Iſa.* 5. 1, 2. where we have the principal things taken notice of, *Viz.*

1. A vineyard is a *ſelect-Place* of ground taken off from that which is *common*, at the Choice of the owner. It is deſigned for a ſpecial uſe, and therefore the prudence and pleaſure of the Owner is employed in making choice where, and on what ſpot he will have it, and by this Choice it is ſeparated from his Other Land, and devoted to ſuch an uſe. Thus the Church is a particular Company of men, taken from the reſt of the world, at the pleaſure of God, to be to him a *peculiar people*. Though he is Lord of all the world yet he hath not as yet pleaſed to extend the bounds of his Church to all, but it is planted where and as he ſees meet, Chriſt therefore aſſigns it to his meer pleaſure, *Math.* 11. 25.

2. Vineyards were wont to be planted on *Fruitful Hills*; ſo is the Church of God, *Verſe.* 1, *An Hill* for it's Conſpicuousneſs and pleaſant Scituation, being for delight as well as profit: The Viſible Church is to be *Viſible*; they are, as it were, *on an Hill*, *Mat.* 5. 14. they are not to be aſhamed of their Profeſſion, but to own it openly and *before men*. And a *Fertile Place*, fit to produce profit to the Owner, *ſuitable for the growth of Vines*, and ſuch plants

Plants as are to be planted in it. All places in the world, and all persons are in themselves alike capable of being spiritually fruitful; but where God plants his Church, he makes such places Fertile; and if there be any place where fruit is brought forth to his praise, it is there.

3. A Vineyard is wont to be *Fenced* in for its preservation, and safety from damage: The barren Wilderness useth to be left open and common, for all manner of wild Beasts to range in, and feed upon; but a Vineyard is Fenced, *verse 2*. And as a Fence is to divide between that and the other ground, so to be a security to it, that Beasts may not come in and devour it; because so all the industry and Cost of the Owner would be lost, and the Plants exposed to be trodden down and wasted. Thus hath God made a Fence between his visible Church and the rest of the World; he hath set up a Wall or Hedge about it, to keep out such as are Enemies to him and his people; and carefully preserves it from mischief: this respects the special Providence of God, or that care which he takes in looking after it, in being a *Wall of Fire round about it*.

4. A Vineyard is wont to be planted with *Select-Plants*. In the Wilderness Plants grow of themselves; but in a Vineyard none are suffered, but such as are set by the Keeper at the pleasure of the Owner, and he is wont to make choice of such as are most likely and

promising; and here the skill and choice of the Husbandman determines. There is a special Providence of God in bringing men into the visible Church, and giving them a Station there; he takes whom he will, and leaves whom he will; & usually in the first Plantation of Churches, there are men eminent and desirable, *verse 2. He planted it with the choicest Vines, Jer. 2. 21. I planted thee a noble Vine.*

5. The Husbandman is wont to use greatest care and pains in Manuring of his Vineyard: and this is exprest, *verse 2. He gathered out the Stones, &c.* and there are two things in it; a removing of all impediments, that would hinder the fertility of it, as throwing out stones, and weeding up such hurtful Plants, as are apt to spring up, shade the other, and eat out the heart of the Land; and the applying of all dunging, digging and mending to it, that is accommodable to make it bear. Thus hath God been wont in his visible Church, to give them all helps and advantages in Ordinances & Providences to further & encourage them in Holiness, and Godly Conversation: there are no prudent courses omitted or neglected: He therefore calls them to judge in this Affair, *verse 4.*

6. Vineyards were wont to have Towers built in them, *Verse. 2. They were in danger of being Robbed, and for that Reason they set a Watch-house in the midst of them, where*

where they kept some or other to have inspection of the Vineyard, and secure it from Thieves : This points to Gods special Care of, and Vigilant Providence over his Church, looking after it, that it be kept from the inroads of such as would be willing to do mischief in it : thus we have Gods declaring his care in this respect, *isa. 27. 2.* for this cause all such as *Despise* it, are said to offend, *Jer. 2. 3.*

7. They used also to have a *Wine-Press* placed in the Vineyard, *Verse. 2.* And the use of it was to Tread the Grapes in, and press out the juice of them, and so Prepare the Wine to be drunk; for both the Fat and the Press are Comprehended in this word. This word, [*Winepress*] is in Scripture used *Metaphorically* for Gods Judgments upon his enemies and the afflictions that he brings upon his people, and for the sufferings of Christ : Properly it was an instrument of preparing the fruit for some noble Service; and it notes to us all the helps which God affords to his People in his Church, for their faithful serving him, and making their Obedience acceptable to him : and here the Sufferings of Christ challenge the first place, without which we could not be accepted; though all other helps to both Faith and Obedience are also comprehended.

8. A Vineyard is planted with a *Design* of the

the Owners Profit. All wise Agents design something in what they do : no man plants a vineyard, but he would eat and drink of the fruits of it ; it is therefore with this expectation that he is at the cost and labour with it ; and so God looked that his Vineyard should yield grapes, *verse 2.* This is spoken after the manner of men ; God knows what every one will do : but it is rational to expect in the ordinary course, that a vineyard, well manured, will answer the Owners design ; and why should not the visible Church do so, in respect of God, who hath been at as much expence upon them ?

9. All Plants in a vineyard do not answer the Owners end and expectation. There are some that bear no fruit at all, others that degenerate, and their fruit is sower, and not fit for the use for which it was planted ; although some other improvement may possibly be made of it : and all that are in the visible Church, do not answer the husbandry that hath been laid out upon them. As there are fruitless branches in a vine, so there are fruitless fig-trees in a vineyard, that do just contrary to expectation, *verse 2.* but this will come in an after consideration.

2. On what account the visible Church is said to be Gods Vineyard ?

A. Not only on a general account, as the whole Creation is called his, but upon more special

special and peculiar reasons, it is to be acknowledged for his propriety, and that more especially,

1. Because he hath *done* all that for it where, by it is made a vineyard, it is all *his doing*; he planted, he fenced it, &c. all the cost and labour which hath been laid out upon it is his charge: God tells them that he *planted* them, Jer. 2. 21. and whom shall the vineyard call Master, but him who made it so? all the World lay in common, all mankind were alike by their Apostasy, and God was under no obligation to them, or necessity lying on him to extend this favour to any, or to these more than others, to bring them into such an estate as that, but he, *of his good pleasure*, because he had a mind to make them his people, dealt thus with them.

2. Because the visible Church, and they that are in it, are by *Profession* devoted to him. There is an outward Sanctification, or Consecration of them to the Service of God: They do by Covenant, declare that they are none of their own but his. This properly belongs to the Profession of Christians, and they that deny it, deny themselves to be such: they say they are Gods propriety, and have given themselves up to him and his Service. Every time they renew their Covenant, they anew assert it: this is their plea with God in trouble, Jer. 14. 9. *We are called by thy Name,*

3. Because he expects more *Service and glory* from these than from other men, He will be glorified in all men; but he looks that these should *glorify him*: he requires it, waits for it, and will be very angry at them if they do not pay it him. He reckons that all which he hath done for them more than others, should engage them to love him more than they do, and to endeavour to bring forth much fruit, whereby he may be glorified, Joh. 15. 8. and if they fall short here, they frustrate these expectations, i. e. they come behind of what in reason was to have been expected of them.

4. Because all the *profit* of the vineyard belongs to him. Who is the Owner but he who receives the Rent of the vineyard; or he unto whom it is in justice due? It is true, God is not profited as to his eternal glory, by the best Services of any of his Creatures; but his *Declarative Glory* is in this way advanced, his Church therefore are peculiarly said to be to him for a name, and for a praise, Jer. 13. 21.

(41)

U S E I.

For Information: Learn hence;

1. That God is to be acknowledged in all the benefits which his Church partakes in. All that they are or have more or better than the World, they owe it to him. His Vineyard lay open till he fenced it off, and had done so still, if he had not done it: are any place or people made to enjoy the Gospel and means of Grace? they are of Gods providing and bestowing; and that these are preserved to them in despite of all the malice of Satan, and rage of ungodly men, is because God is concerned for and looks after this Vineyard of his: yea, that there is a visible Church at this day in the World, and it is not long ago extinct, no thank to the enemy, nor to the people of God themselves, but to him; they may sing after the Psalmist, *Psal. 124. begin. Had not the Lord been on our side, &c.* nor is it any deserving of theirs, who have often provoked him to lay them open; but only because they are his, and it hath pleased him to make them his people, *1 Sam. 12. 22.*

2. That

2. That God is to be *seen* and *adored* in all the *Tribulations* that come upon his Church at any time. Is it his vineyard? then certainly there can be no breach made in its hedge, no beast of prey get into it to devour, nor inroads be made upon it, but by his permission, and over-ruling Hand; and when it is so, it is a witness of his displeasure; it saith there is some fault that he finds with it, that it doth not answer his expectation; that its returns have not been according to the improvement: they are therefore to look beyond instruments; let his Church do acknowledge his anger in it, *Psal. 80. 18.* and this tells us what is the duty incumbent on the people of God, when at any time it is so, *viz.* to fall down penitently before him, to confess our unfruitfulness, and beg his mercy, and amendment of us; and in this way to wait for his return again to his vineyard.

3. How *dangerous* it is for any to go about to *harm* the Church. All the damage, mischief, *stroy* that is done to the vineyard falls upon the Owner; he looks upon himself as touched in it, and thereupon concerned to sue for reparation: God accounts that *they who touch his people, touch the apple of his eye*, and therefore when they suffer, they can plead, *it is for thy sake, Psal. 44. 21.* and thereupon they can argue, *arise, plead thine own cause, Psal. 74. 22.* needs then it must be a daring and dangerous

ious attempt for any to set themselves to pluck down the hedges, or bark the trees, or hurt the Vines ; they resist God, and *who ever resisted him and prospered ?* and this may help the patience of Gods people, and tell them what reason there is, why they should quietly and confidently commit all such things to him, knowing assuredly that he will find a time to right them, because his own glory is therein concerned.

4. That nothing is to be done in the visible Church without *Gods Direction*. If it be his vineyard ; of his planting, ordering, disposing, who then shall dare to alter, or add to his pleasure about it ? The Owner indeed may set *Watchmen* to guard, and *Husbandmen* to dress his *Vineyard* ; but they must wait his advice and order in the management of it : and for them to add, alter, take away, without consulting him, much more against his direct Command, is audaciousness, and highly provoking ; and if the Church be Gods *Vineyard*, we are sure that he hath staid it, put all the Plants in their Order and Method ; for men then to displace, bring an Order into his Church, *that never entered into his heart*, and remove that which he hath established, is high contempt.

U S E II.

For Exhortation, these few Lessons may be here Learnt :

1. Are we Gods Vineyard ? labour we then to bring forth our fruits unto God. It is the complaint which he makes of Israel; *Hos. 10. 1. He is an empty vine, he brings forth fruit to himself.* It is the Apostles demand, *1 Cor. 9. 7. Who planneth a Vineyard, and eateth not the fruit ?* Shall God be at all the Charge he hath laid out upon us, and shall he not have our fruits paid to him ? shall we seek our selves, and our carnal interests, and neglect to glorifie God ? God forbid ! The great study and care lying upon us, is to be always enquiring, how we may do most for God ; how we may, so live as he may have honour by us ; and then we live as those that are not our own, but are bought with a price. Then, indeed we answer our end, when we bring honour to him, *Isa. 43. 21.*

2. Let us go to him for all the *Manuring* that we need at any time. Do we find Grace at a stay among us, and our fruitfulness impeded ? it is his work to purge us that we may bring forth more fruit, *Job. 15. 2.* Do our hearts grow hard ? beg of him to dig them up again and make them mellow : are we barren ?

seek of him to mend us: do we find the briars and thorns of carnal lusts growing up, and beginning to stunt the graces of his Spirit in us? ask him to stub them up: and let us chearfully submit to his Husbandry in all these things.

3. Let this put us upon it the more to lament the degeneracy of the visible Church. Is that Gods Vineyard? and is all the rest of the World a Wilderness? and doth that begin to look like a Wilderness too? are there growing in it, instead of *Plants of renown*, the *degenerate Plants of a strange vine*? doth it bring forth instead of grapes, *wild Grapes*? it should deeply affect our hearts when we take notice of this, to think, this is Gods Vineyard, and therefore how much of dishonour is there hereby brought to his Holy Name? these are they from whom alone he expects fruit, and do they answer his ends so little? let it be for a Lamentation.

4. Let us *tell* him, and call earnestly for his help, when at any time the Church is under Oppression. Who should be acquainted with the damages done to the Vineyard, but the Owner? and let this be our great encouragement to pray hard, and to pray believingly in times of Calamity, to consider that we can go to God and say, thy Church, thy Chosen, thy Beloved are in distress; *Thy Vineyard is laid waste*. God hath given us this hold of faith

to fasten on; and let us make the best improvement of it in the most cloudy and dark days of Affliction, because he who hath chosen Zion, will not forsake her.



SERMON II

DOCTRINE II.

ALL visible Professors are Fig-trees planted in Gods Vineyard.

That Christ designs a particular person in our Text, hath been already observed; and that it is one that is planted in the Vineyard, is in so many words expressed. That a true Convert, or one that is effectually and savingly called, cannot be only intended, the whole frame of the Parable confirms. That it cannot be applicable to any one of the Children of Men in general without limitation, appears because the Heathen World are without

without the pale, and are reckoned in the Scripture, to be in the *Wilderness*, and *afar off*: whereas this must needs denominate some Relation to the Church of God, which can be none but that of visible Professors.

By these I understand all such as have by an open act of their own, acknowledged Christ and his ways, and yielded themselves to his Government in his Church; together with their Children: for God always took parents into the Covenant together with their posterity, as the Scripture fully confirms. Here we may enquire,

1. On what account they are called *Fig-trees*?

2. In what sense they are planted in Gods Vineyard?

3. What advantages they do hereby enjoy?

1. On what account they are called *Fig-trees*?

A. That the people of God are in Scripture, particularly and personally compared to *Trees*, is observable: sometimes to the *Cedar* for its stateliness and perpetual greenness, *Psal.* 92. 12. and to the *Palm Tree*, for its growing the faster under weight, *ibid.* and often to *Fruit-trees*: to the *Olive*, for its excellent fruit, and great bearing, *Psal.* 52. 8. and to the *Fig-tree* in our Text. This is applied to Professors, not for what they al-

always are, but for what they ought to be, and they contradict their profession if they are not so: and what God righteously expects of them, on account of the manuring which he affords them: and here let these things be observed.

1. The *Fig-tree* bears good and sweet fruit, thus we read, *Judg. 9. 11.* it is a fruit-bearing tree, and its fruit is pleasant and wholesome; it was therefore a great part of their Food in those *Eastern Countries*; and God expects of them that are in his Church, that they should be fruitful; he loves no barren ones there. *Christ cursed the Fig-tree that had no fruit on it*; and he expects that they should bear pleasant fruit, the works of *Righteousness*, and *true Holiness*; such as he himself may take pleasure in, and that may be truly comfortable to themselves, God therefore commends their Obedience by such an expression, *Hos. 9. 10. I saw your Fathers as the first ripe in the Fig-tree, at her first time.* Unfruitful Professors are a disgrace to their Profession; and wicked ones are worse, who bring forth such fruits as are worse than none.

2. It is a Tree very profitable to the Owner, not only because its fruit is good, but because it is wont to bring forth in great plenty: the Owner was well paid for his labour, in sowing and tending of it; this is intima-

ted in Prov. 27. 18. *whoso keepeth the Fig-tree, shall eat the fruit thereof*; and who indeed would take pains to cultivate that which will yield him no profit? God expects that Christians should be profitable in their generation, that they live to some good purpose. It is true, God is not essentially benefited, by any thing the Creature can do, all that it hath and is, is from him; but there is a great deal of honour redounds to the Name of God, his declarative Glory is exalted by the fruitfulness of Christians, *John 15. 8.* and the contrary is to his dishonour.

3. The Fig-tree requires *Husbandry* to make its fruit pleasant and profitable. There is vast difference between those that grow wild in the Wilderness, and such as are planted in a Vineyard, and there cultivated; they are neither so fruitful, nor are their fruits comparable. Then is the Fig-tree most like to answer its end, when it is planted in a good Soil, and looked after with suitable care. God doth not expect that from them that are out of the Church, which he doth from these: it is no wonder to see them barren to good works, and bearing of wild unpleasant fruits, but from these better is looked for; and indeed there are none that can please God, or know how to serve him acceptably, but those who are brought under the

the enjoyment of the means of Grace ; hence that in *Acts* 17. 30.

4. The *Fig-tree* puts forth and bears early. As soon as ever the Spring comes, this is one of the first Trees which by budding and setting, gives evidence to it : it presently receives the influences of Heaven, and shews it self, *Mat.* 24. 32. God looks for early fruit of those that are of his visible Church ; the Professors who are born and brought up under the means, should begin betime to devote themselves to his Service : they should receive impression by all the influences of the means of Grace. God looks that the Children of the Church should *Serve* him from their *Child-hood*.

5. The fruit of the Fig-tree *Ripens Gradually*.

There are some figs are ripe and fit for use before others, and all the time of Harvest, there are some ready for use every day, till the bearing time be over ; hence we read of the *First ripe Figs*, *Hos.* 9. 14. Thus God would have Professors to be bringing forth of their fruits every day, during the whole season of their serving him, *i. e.* all their lives long, *Psal.* 1, 3. *Bringeth forth fruit in his season*. They should begin, and hold on in the service of God, be always doing something which may be for his Honour, and the good of their own Souls

Souls, and not be weary of it as long as they live, *Psal. 92. 14.* They shall still bring forth fruit in Old-age.

6. The Fig-tree easily parts with its fruits when they are ripe, for the use of such as come to gather them. A little wind, or an easy shaking of the Tree, makes them to fall, *Isaiah 3. 12.* If they be shaken, they shall fall into the mouth of the eater.

Thus should Professors be ready for every good work: they should be ripe and forward for any thing wherein they may serve God, and profit others: as soon as the wind blows, the Spirit of God suggests to them, they ought to attend him, and put forth to acts of piety: when ever they find an occasion of doing any thing for God, they should not be hard to be brought to do it; but do it with all forwardness and Cheerfulness of mind.

2. In what sense they are planted in Gods Vineyard?

A As they stand more nearly related to God in the Gospel-Covenant, than Heathen do. We are here to observe, that besides the Everlasting Covenant which is contracted between God and his truly called ones, there is another Covenant relation between God and Men, which is not Common to all, but restrained to the Visible Church, and such as are related unto that;

that; he is for that cause said, *To know them above all the Families in the Earth Amos. 3. 2.* And this is of a larger extent then the former, *Rom. 9. 6.* *They are not all Israel, which are of Israel.* In that there are only God's chosen ones; in this there are others besides. The Gospel Net which is thrown out, encloseth all sorts of fish in it good and bad, which must in time be separated. Now these have Titles of Specialty put upon them, they are called, *Saints, Holy Ones, Gods peculiar people, his husbandry, his building, his Children, &c.* But if it be enquired how they came by this Relation, and upon what bottom it stands, take these Conclusions.

1. That God hath his Elect scattered up and down among others, who must be brought in to enjoy Salvation. These are, in their Natural State, *strangers, and far from God*, but they must be saved: and it is certainly for their sakes that God ever empaled a vineyard, set up a Church in the World; These lie among the rubbish, have their dwelling up and down together with the rest of mankind; but God knows them, will find them out and provide for their Welfare, it was for their sakes that Christ sanctified himself, *John 17. 18.*

2. That the Gospel is the great Instrument of Gods Appointment for Conversion. Not that his power is limited or stinted to this way

way in it self, but because he hath chosen it, as that which his Infinite Wisdom hath thought most convenient, and accommodable to his design: this therefore is said to be *the power of God unto Salvation*, Rom. 1. 16. and they that are without are declared to be *without hope*, Eph. 2. 12. In the Gospel-way, God treats men according to their own nature, by making offers, and discovering to them the way of life, and so convincing and perswading them as reasonable Creatures: and in it are all those discoveries made, which point men how they may be saved, and sent to quicken and encourage them to attend upon the same.

3. That Gods *Providence* orders it that this Gospel shall be Preached there where his Elect are seated. If he hath any of his Chosen in such a place, he takes care that the means of Salvation shall be brought unto them, because this is the way that he hath designed their Salvation by. That the spreading of the Gospel in the world, and its coming to one place, and not to another, is under the peculiar conduct of Gods Sovereignty, is clear from Scripture, see *Acts* 16. 6, 7. Now, because his Elect must be called, in order to their being saved, and the Gospel is the ordinary *Medium* of Conversion, he having put this honour upon it; he therefore *Commitions it unto them, and his over-ruling*

ling hand causeth them to enjoy it.

4. That the Gospel, when it comes, is not Preached to these only, but to many others. God is pleased to make use of the Ministry of men, in the dispensation of his Gospel; and he doth not tell them, (how then should they know ?) who in particular belong to the Election of his Grace; but he hath bidden them to *Preach it to every Creature*, Mark 16. 15. They are to cast their Net into the Sea, and take whom they can catch, to offer Christ and Life by him, unto all, to invite every one that hears them to come to him for life: the offers are to be general, *Isai. 55. 1. Rev. 22. 17.*

5. The Gospel offers a *Conditional Covenant* to men. In all Treaties and Transactions between God and Men, *Precepts* and *Privileges* are put together, and there is a close connexion made between them, there is a certain dependence of the one upon the other, *Mark 16. 16.* God reveals a new Covenant in the Gospel to men, he opens to them the terms of it, and requires that if they will be related to him in it, they must put themselves under these conditions: and in the visible Covenant, he accepts men on such conditions: *they promise* so to do, and *he promiseth* that if they fulfill according to their engagement, he will do so for them.

6. Hence men, by openly *owning* and *submitting* to Gospel Terms, bring themselves under this Conditional Covenant. It is a grand mistake to think, that there are none in Covenant with God, but those who are absolutely under the Promise of Salvation: the very notion of a Covenant implies a dependent Condition, to which the Privileges of it refer. The Visible Covenant then, thus stands: God offers Christ, and Salvation by him, in the Gospel, tells men, if they believe and repent they shall be saved; presents the Gospel Ordinances as means to work Faith and Repentance in them, and so bring them to Salvation: they accept of the offer professedly, submit to the termes, and now they are taken under the Covenant, and must stand or fall to the Conditions of it: when they have thus done, they are said to be in God's Vineyard; and on this very account it is, that a People in the Visible Covenant, have so many warnings, and cautions given them, as, *Psal* 50, *Rom.* 8. 13. *Heb.* 12. 24.

3. What advantages do they hereby enjoy?

A. I may say with the Apostle in, *Rom.* 3. 2. *Much every way.* Here let it be by way of caution observed, that this state of professors, doth not secure unto them Eternal Life, because herein they do stand probationers

ners for it, and may, through their own Default, come short of it at last. But yet there are many Priviledges which such are made Partakers in, above these who are not in the Vineyard; in particular.

1. They have the way to eternal life revealed to them, whilst others dwell in *Darkness and the Regions of the shadow of Death*. These live in the *Light of the Gospel*, and this is to be looked upon as a great Priviledge, hence that, *Math. 4. 15. 16.* And it must needs be so, because they are thus brought nearer to Salvation than the other, there is now hope Concerning them, whereas the other are declared to be *without hope*, *Eph. 2. 12.* Salvation depends upon Revelation, and God never useth to send his Gospel, but there where he hath this life to dispense: now it is to them that these *Oracles are committed* *Ro. 3. 2.* And these Oracles point men how they may obtain Salvation, it is therefore called the *Gospel of peace and salvation*.

2. They have the *offers of Eternal Life* made to them. Where-ever the Gospel is enjoyed, there are made to men the Tenders of Salvation: They are not only told that there is such a thing, but they are invited to accept of it, they are called upon and counselled not to reject it: they to whom this

Embassy

Embassy is committed, are to pray men to be reconciled unto God, 2 Cor. 5. 20. This the Heathen live without; God doth not so much as vouchsafe to ask them if they are willing to have Christ and life by him: they are his enemies, and there is no Herald sent to them to proclaim peace among them: but Christ pleads with those that are in the Church, and complains of an affront given him, if they refuse, Job. 1. 40.

Nay, they have the Promise of Salvation made to them on Condition: therefore are the Promises said to be theirs, Rom. 9. 4. for by having the Covenant; they must have the Promise too, because it is Essential to it; and there cannot be a Covenant without it. It is true, it must be understood as a Covenant-Promise, or else it is mistaken; so that none may arrogate it to themselves; but according to the tenor of the Covenant to which it belongs; and this is a great benefit, and belongs not to others; they are strangers from the Covenants of Promise, Eph. 2. 12. God doth not say to them, and engage that if they believe they shall be saved; there is no such treaty passeth between them.

4. Yea they have the *means* of Salvation, both outward and inward: and hereby they are in the fairer probability of obtaining it. It is the priviledge of a tree that is designedly planted in a Vineyard, to have the Husbandry thereof bestowed upon it, in order

der to its being a good tree. Thus they who are in the Visible Church are under all means for their spiritual profit, none of which Heathen enjoy : they have the outward dispensation of the Ordinances, and the inward stirrings of the Spirit of God ; they have *line upon line, &c.* and all the mercies and afflictions that befall them, are under the like dispensation, made serviceable to the treaty of the Gospel, to perswade them to accept of and embrace the Salvation offered.

5. They have the *Seal* of the promise afforded to them. *Baptism*, as light as some make of it, is as a *sign* of Gods Grace, so a *seal* of the Gospel Covenant ; and is not only an honorary put upon such as enjoy it, declaring them to belong to God in Covenant, and putting his *Name* upon them ; but it is also a Confirmation of the Promise, and it saith this for God, to all such as he appoints it unto, that he will certainly and without fail be as good as his word, to put it out of doubt that if *they believe they shall be Saved.*

6 They enjoy the outward *special favours* of God in Communion with his Church. God hath a special care for his Church, there is a singular protection that he affords to it, and these have rich benefits by being of it. Every plant that is set in the vineyard, hath the privilege of the *sence* and the *Tower* : and, although

although particular degenerate professors sometimes feel special Judgments upon them, as there will be occasion to observe afterwards; yet how long do men that have no saving grace enjoy much by being of the visible Church? *Cham* escaped the universal deluge, by being of *Noah's* family; and to be sure, whilst they carry it soberly & Religiously, God is wont to protect them with the rest of his people.

7. They leave the *inheritance* of these blessings to their posterity. God is wont to receive parents with their children into his Covenant, and the promise runs down to *Generations*; and where God hath given saving grace to Parents, they count it an high favour of God to them, that if their Children die in Infancy, they have the Covenant to comfort themselves in concerning them; if they outlive them, though the Times are evil and threatening, yet they shall leave them plants in the Vineyard, under the Covenant protection of God, and the visible *Means* of all the means of Salvation.

U S E I.

For Information: *Learn hence;*

1. How *injurious* they are to these, who deny

deny them a room in Gods Vineyard, who disown and reject them from having any relation to the visible Church of Christ; who reckon them among those that are without; and consequently debar them of, and thrust them from these priviledges; such there be; but what wrong they do to these, nay how much they set themselves against Christ, is easy to observe; are we wiser than he? or shall we dare to control him? shall he say, I have planted these in my Vineyard, and shall we say they are in the Wilderness? A great reason why many do thus, ariseth from their mistaking & misapplying the word [*Church*] and want of distinguishing between the *Church of the first-born*, & the visible Church, and the priviledges which are peculiar, and those that are common: *Church*, is sometimes taken for the Called and Converted, every visible professor is not of this, Rom. 9. 6. *all are not Israel, that are of Israel*. Sometimes for all such as are externally in Covenant with God, and so it includes them, *Psal.* 135. 5. There are some benefits that none do actually partake in but the Converted, and these are the more inward saving benefits of Christ, which are applied to them, and only offered to others. There are other priviledges are common, being given to the Church visible, and serviceable to Conversion, as well as to Edification; and these have

all visible Professors a share in:

It is true, there are some of those, that every Professor may not ipso facto partake in, there being qualifications requisite, by Christ's Appointment, to fit them for them; yet all that are so visibly qualified, are not of the invisible Church; and the other priviledges are to fit them hereto; and a plant may be in the Nursery, though it be not as yet fit to set out; yet is so in the vineyard, and hath both its Fence and Tillage belonging to it. It is an awkward way to bring Sons to Christ, by disinteresteding them in the Covenant-hopes, which are their great encouragements, and they of old, thought it was as good as saying, go serve other Gods, Josh. 22. 24, 25.

2. Are visible Professors fig-trees? then what do briars and thorns in Gods Vineyard? it speaks terror to all such as prove themselves so. How amazing a thing will it be, when God comes to look into his visible Church, and instead of finding them there to be fruit-bearing Trees, and such as answer the end of their being there, he shall observe that it abounds with *cursed Plants* that are appointed for burning? when he shall say, *I planted thee a Fig-tree*, how comes it to pass that thou art *degenerated* into a bramble? will they not then be speechless, like him that was found at the *Supper*, without a *Wedding Garment*? let no such then be proud or boast of their Station; whatever their priviledges

priviledge be, I am sure the danger is greater, and they shall find it, when he shall come to take out of his Kingdom whatsoever doth offend; when the Tares shall be separated from the Wheat; and mean while the place they are in, exposeth them to be the sooner rooted out of the world, as will afterwards be made evident.

3. Are visible Professors planted by Gods own order in his visible Church? then certainly *God looks for more from them than others.* All priviledges have duties annexed to them; and every *Talent* that any have received must be accounted for. The Husbandman expects that his Vines and Trees that are under his careful tilth, should grow faster, and bear better and more fruit than such as are in the open field, neglected: & let me assure you that are Children of godly Parents, that have partaken in the Seal of the Gospel-Covenant, that have acknowledged your selves to be of Gods People, openly owned his Covenant, submitted to his Government, and promised Obedience to him; that you ought not to live as others do, in the vanity of their minds; that you are not called to uncleanness, but to Holiness; and if you resolve to do as others do, and live as others live, you will greatly provoke the Holy God to jealousy against you.

Heaven

21

21

that can be, that God will not forsake his little Vineyard in this Land.



SERMON III

And he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

WE have been considering of the Subject of the Parable; That which follows to be observed is,

II. The barrenness of the Fig-tree taken notice of by the Owner; and here are two things to be observed.

i. The Husbandmans peculiar inspection which he had upon this plant, *He came and sought fruit thereon.* [*He came,*] i. e. to this particular Tree. Motion is attributed to God after the manner of men, for he is every where by his Infinite Omnipresence; But it intimates a peculiar observation, [*seeking*] this word is also accommodated to humane Understanding & seeking, properly implies

plies an enquiring after something that one is at a loss about ; but God knows what every one is, and will do : but it intends both a curious inspection and a rational expectation. The word is sometimes used for earnest desiring, yea importunately requiring a thing : God requires it, and well may he observe whether they do answer this injunction of his. [*Fruit thereon,*] Fig-trees are planted for bearing, and visible Professors are put into the Church that they may have opportunity for serving God : and well may it be expected that every thing should answer its end.

2. The Husbandmans disappointment, or missing of his expectation ; *he found none,* Notwithstanding his best care in seeking, he could not find one fig upon the tree ; and this inferrs, that there was none, for if there had been any, he would have discovered it ; God to be sure, who is Omniscient, cannot but see and know whether there be any thing done by the Professor that is truly good.

There are three Observations which we may gather, and briefly improve from this passage,

U S E II.

For *Exhortation* : And it may be directed,

1. To all visible Professors ; let the consideration of this truth teach you,

1. A Lesson of *Thankfulness* to God for this great favour and dignity that he hath advanced you to. Think what a favour it is, and how much you are priviledged by it, think how it is with the Heathen World, who are *without God, without Christ, &c.* and how comes it that you are not so? what are you by nature better than they? whence came this but from the meer good pleasure of God? it was only because it *seemed good to him* to make you thus to differ? Is there any distinguishing mercy in having the Oracles of God, the hopes of Salvation, and all encouragements to further you in the pursuit of it? let him have the praise of it?

2. To *endeavour* after *fruitfulness* : to bear much, and to bear good and sweet fruit. Are you in the Vineyard? bear then: are you fig-trees there? then bear figs. Let your fruit prove that you are indeed *Trees of Righteousness*, such as may be a credit to the Vineyard wherein you grow; and let this consideration be a quickning motive to you

to be more diligent in these endeavours : say, *what shall I render to the Lord for all these benefits to me ?* and the answer will be, glorify God : and Christ tells you how that is to be done, *Joh. 15. 8.* often rouse up your backward Souls with such a thought ; what do I do in the vineyard ? what have I all this price in my hands for ? what will God say of me, if I should prove unprofitable in my generation ? will not the ground that I grow in, and all this husbandry that is laid out upon me, rise up in the Judgment against me, if for all I should prove barren ?

2. To Children and young ones in particular ; are you Gods fig-trees ? do then as the fig-tree doth : labour to put forth betimes, and to bear early fruit : is it not spring-time with you through Gods mercy ? have you not all the means and advantages of being good betimes ? and let me assure you Children, that God thinks it long before you set your selves to seek and serve him : and Oh how acceptable would it be to him to see you make haste and not delay to devote your selves to him, by forsaking of youthful lusts, and dedicating your blooming years to him. How pleasant would it be to see little fig-trees bringing forth, and their branches laden with figs ? might there be more of this to be observed, it would be the most joyful token

that can be, that God will not forsake his
little Vineyard in this Land.



SERMON III

*And he came and sought fruit thereon, and
found none.*

VWE have been considering of the Sub-
ject of the Parable; That which
follows to be observed is,

II. The barrenness of the Fig-tree taken
notice of by the Owner; and here are two
things to be observed.

I. The Husbandmans peculiar inspection
which he had upon this plant, *He came and
sought fruit thereon.* [*He came,*] i. e. to
this particular Tree. Motion is attributed
to God after the manner of men, for he is
every where by his Infinite Omnipresence;
But it intimates a peculiar observation, [*see-
king*] this word is also accommodated to hu-
man Understanding & seeking, properly im-
plies

plies an enquiring after something that one is at a loss about ; but God knows what every one is, and will do : but it intends both a curious inspection and a rational expectation. The word is sometimes used for earnest desiring, yea importunately requiring a thing : God requires it, and well may he observe whether they do answer this injunction of his. [*Fruit thereon,*] Fig-trees are planted for bearing, and visible Professors are put into the Church that they may have opportunity for serving God : and well may it be expected that every thing should answer its end.

2. The Husbandmans disappointment, or missing of his expectation ; *he found none,* Notwithstanding his best care in seeking, he could not find one fig upon the tree ; and this inferrs, that there was none, for if there had been any, he would have discovered it : God to be sure, who is Omniscient, cannot but see and know whether there be any thing done by the Professor that is truly good.

There are three Observations which we may gather, and briefly improve from this passage :

DOCTRINE I.

God expects that every one that is planted in his Vineyard should bring forth fruits answerable to this Planting.

And this is a rational expectation. What Husbandman that sees a fruit-tree in his Enclosure, would expect otherwise ?

In clearing up this Doctrine, three things may be enquired into.

1. What fruit is it that God expects ?
2. In what respect he may be said thus to expect it ?
3. What reason there is why he may justly so expect ?

1. What *fruit* it is that God expects ?

A. Not any fruit of what kind soever ; for if so, then God would never miss of his expectation. All men are doing something or other ; every man hath his works which he must be called to an *account* for, be judged by, and receive a *recompense* accordingly, 2 Cor. 5. 10. there are the *fruits of the flesh*, as well as of the *spirit* ; but there are some fruits that are reckoned as worse than none, and let men have never so many of them, they are for all accounted barren, *Hos.* 10. 1. every man looks that his Trees should bear

bear, according to the kind they were plant-
 ed for, and had a resemblance of: they do
 not go about to gather *figs of thistles*; but
 they promise themselves, that if they be fig-
 trees, they will surely bear figs, and good
 ones too: if therefore the Vine bear *grapes*,
 yet if they prove *wild and sower*, they are as
 bad as none, *Isa. 5. 2.* They that are placed
 in the visible Church are fig-trees, they seem
 at least to be so, they bear such leaves upon
 them; not that God can be deceived in any,
 he knows what they are indeed, but by their
 outward profession they declare themselves
 to be such: they say they are Gods people,
called by his name, devoted to his service;
 they are visibly *plants of Righteousness*. The
 fruits then which God expects of such are
 the fruits of righteousness; that they should
 live a life of *faith which works by love*; that
 they should serve and obey him in all things,
 should walk in an holy conformity to his re-
 vealed will, should *do the works of God*; live
 answerably to the *teachings of the grace which*
hath appeared to them, Tit. 2. 11, 12. In summe,
 that they walk in conformity to the Rules of
 Gods Word, frame their lives in all things
 according to it: these are fruits pleasing to
 him, and such as become his Vineyard, and
 those wherein you may *shew forth his praise*.

2. On what account he may be said
 thus to expect it?

4. Though

A. Though God condescends to speak to us in our language, yet it becomes us always to interpret him so as is becoming his Sacred Majesty. All things therefore that imply any infirmity in men, are to be removed from our thoughts in our interpretation of him, in what he declares to us. Here then let us observe that when men are said to expect a thing, it implies, 1. That they are at some loss about it before hand. 2. That they entertain it in an hope. 3. That this hope depends upon probabilities that may be frustrated, & so they may miss. We are not to suppose any such thing concerning the great God, for, *what he desires, he doth*; he knows all things a forehand, for they depend upon his All-Efficiency, he cannot therefore be disappointed, or lose his hope. This expectation therefore is not to be attributed to him in respect of his *secret will*, decrees, or purposes; as if he had left any of them dubious or uncertain, or depending on the creature, on which he must wait before he can determine what will be, this is altogether incompatible to the Divine nature; But it must be interpreted of his *revealed will*, in respect of the transactions that have past between God and his People: for, as he treats with them as men, so he is said to look for this or that from them, after the manner of men. It notes the connexion between the end and the

the futableness of the means for the advancing of the end ; here then observe in particular.

1. That there is some *worthy end* of Gods planting a Church in the World. Gods Works are all done in Wisdom : now Wisdom always proposeth to it self a worthy end in all that it doth. *God doth nothing in vain.* There is a great deal of Gods care, and singular Providence discovers it self in and about the affairs of his Church ; in the raising up of Instruments, and sending them forth into the world, with a Commission to gather men out of it into his Vineyard ; in giving them his Gospel and Ordinances ; in making of his Covenant known to them : there is something peculiar which God doth to and for these, from what he doth for other men, *he hath not dealt so by all nations.* There must therefore be some peculiar and eminent design in it, or otherwise he would not have thus done : and it is worthy our enquiry after, that so we may be able to give him the honour that is due to him for it.

2. We are to distinguish between the end of the *purpose* and of the *precept*. If we speak of Gods purposes, *he knows all his works concerning them, before the foundation of the World,* and here he can never be at a loss or disappointed : but that is *secret* to us, and therefore belongs not to our curious search.

Dent. 29. 29. But then the precept of God is that in which he is pleased to reveal himself to us, and shews us what is his will concerning our Duty, or what he hath seen meet to make a duty incumbent upon us; now in the preceptive discovery of Gods Will to his people, he hath told them what it is they ought to propose to themselves as their end, and what are the means which they are to make use of in order to their obtaining it; and this is that which we call *mans* end, because he is commanded to seek it, and Gods end too, because he hath enjoyned men to seek it, and which he intends also to bring about in all these whom he hath ordained to *eternal-life*, *Job. 28. 28.*

3. That the end which every one in the visible Church is called and pointed to, is to bear fruit. It is true, God hath a purpose of his own concerning them, which shall never be frustrate, he will have his honour by them, whether they fructify or no; which way soever it falls, he will have his glory, *Paul is a sweet savour of God, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.* But this is that which God enjoyns them all in: this is his positive command, which he hath laid upon every one that are taken so near unto him: that they do serve and obey him, *Isa. 43. 2. This people have I formed for my self, they shall shew forth my praise.* God requires this
 1 of

of every one, and what men require, they are wont to expect: for, because all men owe Obedience to all the commands of God, and his people are under peculiar, as well as general obligations hereunto, who that is so related would not look that such should obey him? for men then to fail in this respect, is to come short of their end; and God complains as if he had done for them in vain, *Jer. 2. 30.*

4. That all the means that are used with them look directly this way. We are wont to judge of mens designs, by their actions; and by their designs we rationally judge of their expectations; for all men have a secret hope that their designs will succeed, else they would not be at cost to promote them. Now he that shall but rightly consider the nature and tendency of all that is done by God to & for his visible Church, and every one in it, must needs say that all hath a direct and proper reference to their bearing the fruits of Holiness: for what else doth the Gospel Covenant oblige men to, but to glorify God? and that is by a *rightly ordered Conversation*; what else do all the Gospel commands serve to, but to *shew man the way how he is thus to do*? what are all the promises for, but to give them all encouragement needful, to excite and engage them hereunto? and what is the aspect of all the threatnings, but to awaken them, and make

Make them careful of their duty, and afraid to neglect it; and what are all the afflictive providences they meet with for, but to *purge them that they may bear more fruit*?

5. Hence God may truly be said on this account to expect it. Who would not be obeyed in his just commands? and there are two things which among men, are wont eventually to discover to us what they expected, and both these may be attributed to God, according to scripture.

1. They are wont to be *pleased* when their expectations are answered; it gives them a great deal of satisfaction, and we shall find that God is well pleased with the obedience of his People, *Heb. 13. 16. with such Sacrifices God is well pleased.* He is therefore said to *smell a savour of rest* in such things: if *Abel offers his firstlings and the fat, God hath a respect to him, see Heb. 11. 5.* he will therefore say to them that husband their Talents profitably, *well done good and faithful servant*: and he hath gracious rewards to bestow upon such, wherein he testifies how grateful they are to him.

2. They are wont to be *displeased*, if they miss of their expectation, they take it ill, and it is a matter of trouble to them; and the reason is, because, they promised themselves the contrary. Now God in his Word bears witness to his great displeasure at all

such

such as are in his Church, who do not bear fruit: so he did at this fig-tree: *verse 7.* This is it which kindleth his anger against his people, and is the occasion of all the judgments that are brought upon them; when therefore the Scripture gives us an account of the many fearful Calamities which God made his people to undergo, this is made the procuring cause of them; they did *not obey him*, but they *sinned against him*; and all this intimates that which unto men would amount to a seeking or expecting of fruit from such as these are,

3. What reason there is why he may justly so expect?

A. If there be any reason for an husbandman to expect fruit, of a tree that he hath laid out cost and care upon, then well may God look for it of those that are planted in his visible Church, for there is nothing wanting there as to means for their help hereunto; therefore we have the demand, *Isai, 5. 4.* *What could I have done more?* this will appear if we consider.

1. They have sufficient *Conviction* afforded them of the unreasonableness of Disobedience, and reasonableness of Obedience. In the Word and Ordinances these discoveries are plentifully made to them, in which the nature, and evil fruits of sin are plainly set before them, the beauty of Holiness, and

rationality

rationality as well as profitableness of the Service of God, is made clear by several Demonstrations: They are but poor, dark and glimmering notions of these things that the Heathen discover, by the best improvement of the light of nature; but in the visible Church, these things are from time to time exhibited, and the undeniableness of these truths made to appear.

2. They have here also sufficient *direction* afforded them, to point out the way to them, in which they may serve God, & bear the fruits of obedience, *Mic. 6. 8. he hath shewed thee the way O Man!* the world are unacquainted with this, the way of natural obedience is but dim to them, but that of Gospel obedience is altogether hidden from them; *Ro. 3. 17. the way of peace have they not known.* But these have such discoveries, *Psal. 147. 16. he sheweth his word unto Jacob, his Statutes and Judgments unto Israel.* The *Object* of their obedience, *viz.:* God in Christ, is here made known in his Glorious excellencies and perfections; the *way* how fallen man may serve God acceptably, *i. e.* by Faith in Christ, and grace derived from him, is here declared: the *Duties* in which he is thus to be obeyed, and the *sins* that are to be avoided, are here deciphered, and from time to time explained unto them.

3. They have plentiful warnings against sin, and encouragements to obedience laid be-

fore them. God here tells them the danger of the one, and the great benefit that shall accrue to them by the other ; the threatnings and the promises do fully exhibit these things : the death and destruction that by living in sin they shall bring themselves to ; the life and glory that is to be enjoyed in fearing and serving God are urged upon them. God is often saying to them, as *Rom. 8. 13. if ye live after the flesh ye shall dy.* &c. In the Law is discovered the wrath of God against all Unrighteousness ; in the Gospel, the great salvation purchased by Christ, and applied to them that believe in him and serve him, is made known.

4. All needful help is offered them, to enable them thus to serve God, and bring forth fruits to his praise. Man indeed is in himself without strength, he cannot serve God, his Moral Powers are enervated, and altogether disabled by Original sin : but this is no excuse to him, because God hath told him where his help is, *Hos. 13. 9.* and he hath promised his spirit to them that ask him yea and bids them to ask him ; nay the spirit himself offers his help to them, and is grieved that they refuse him, and quench his motions in them, he is ready to relieve their infirmities, to supply them with a new principle of Grace, and strength, and continued influence to help them to be fruitful.

5. All proper pains and endeavours are used with them, to bring them to bear fruit to God. They are *Gods Husbandry*, 1 Cor. 3. 9. they have *line upon line*, &c. they have the dews and showers of Ordinances falling upon them continually, counsels, reproofs, warnings, inward motions and stirrings of the spirit in and with the outward dispensation of the Ordinances; many mercies to allure them to Obedience, and seasonable afflictions to reclaim them from sin, and quicken them to Holiness, to wear them from the World, and prompt them to mind the things of highest concernment for their Souls.

6. All this is afforded to reasonable Creatures. Men that are able in other things to consult, advise, and determine, according to the rules of discretion; and why should they not so do in these too, which are set before them with as clear Demonstration, and urged with greatest seriousness and solemnity, who can tell? and when we have put all things together, what can be said against it, why God may not in all reason expect, that those who are thus advantaged above others, should do more than others, and *make their prospering known to all men by their fruits?*

USE I.

For Information; In three particulars;

1. Learn hence; That Church-Membership is not only a title of dignity, but also an obligation to Service. It is true indeed, it is an honourable thing, a mighty scoop of God to sinful men, that he will take them so near to himself; that he is pleased to make them his Vineyard; to put his name upon them, and prefer them before the world, and it ought to be acknowledged to him: but for men, as too many do, to pride themselves in this, and place their whole confidence in it, without regarding how they use it; or what improvement they make of it; to cry, The Temple of the Lord, and not regard how they live to his dishonour, is directly contrary to the design, and will make all their boastings to be vain. When God had done for his vineyard, he looked for grapes, Isa. 5. 2. he did not plant it for a stew; but for service, and all he doeth for it, is to engage his people in it: Oh that this were more thought of?

2. Hence how inexorable will they be another day, who have had a place in Gods Church, and yet bear no fruit there? doth God expect it? and hath he so much reason to look for it? and do they do what in them lies to cross his ex-

peccations in it, and so disappoint him? as we may speak after the manner of men; surely this will not be to their comfort, but their shame and sorrow in the day of reckoning, and let all that are in the visible Church think of it; assure your selves that there is a time of harvest coming, when every Tree will be looked after, and the fruits will be proved what they are: no fruits, and bad fruits will be condemned: and when God shall plead with you and say, I did this and that for you, I laid out all this care and cost upon you; why then is it that you have not served me? how comes it to pass that all this pains is in vain? will you not then be speechless?

3. We here see the reason of Gods Judgments upon a visible Church, when they do not bear fruit, when they grow to degeneracy, and fall under notorious decays; when the fruits of righteousness grow thin among them; when *Iniquity* begins to abound; and the *first love* is fallen from, and the *first works* are neglected. If we search the records of the Word of God, and enquire how it came to pass, that a people taken so near to God as his ancient people were, felt so much of the smart of Judgments, why the *Hedges* were broken down, and the *Wild Bors* of the *Wilderness* let in, &c. if we ask what occasioned these threatnings against *Ephesus*, *Sardis*, *La-*

Edicca, Rev. 2. 3. here it issues, and how loud doth this speak to us in such a day of Gods anger as this is, to *search and try our ways*, to see if we have not thus gone to decay?

U S E II.

For Exhortation; Let this then be a loud call to every one in the vineyard to be fruitful. Doth God expect this of you? he advised then to answer his expectation, let not this Husbandman lose his labour and cost; and for motive, consider,

1. God will certainly be angry with you, if you do not thus do. It will be a very great provocation to him; it will put him upon thinking what to do with you; he will be weary of his vineyard. Should the Husbandman lose his cost and labour, plant vines and they bear nothing, set fig-trees, and they bring forth unpleasant fruits; and after many essays to make it serviceable, it rather grows worse, will he not be provoked to throw it up? and so God threatens, *Isa. 5. 4.* there is not a readier way to bring ruine; God is not so engaged as not to do it, what saith he to *Jerusalem*? *Jer. 12. 6.* surely I will make thee a *Wilderness*, and *Cities not inhabited.*

2. God will be no loser by you. It is not

with him, as it is with men; if they are frustrated of their hopes, they lose all their expense; but God will not, for he needs not so to do: If the plants in his vineyard will not serve for fruit, they will do for burning, and therein also will he be glorified, and by so much as these have had more cost and pains laid out upon them, by so much more will the Justice of God shine forth in his Righteous Revenge, when his wrath shall burn upon them in proportion to the expense which he hath laid out for them: it is not he therefore but you that will be sufferers, *Paul is a sweet savour of God, &c. 2. Cor. 2. 15. 16:*

3. Your fruitfulness will be your profit, it will turn to your account; God is not advantaged in himself by your righteousness, *Job 35. 6. if thou be righteous, what profitest thou him?* if you are wise, it will be for your selves: the fruits of Holiness, which Gods People bring forth in this life, are the seeds of Glory; there is a great recompense of reward that God hath provided to bestow upon such: Gods Name indeed hath the honour of it, and he deserves it; but the profit returns into the bosom of his people, the more fruit you yield, the more store is laid up for you in heaven, and you shall have the comfort of it, when you rest from your labours, and your works shall follow you.

4. How unreasonable is it that you should not

not serve and glorify God in your lives? doth not every thing he doth for you bespeak it? is it not the voice of all the privileges of all the means that you enjoy? doth not every counsel, warning, promise call for it? every mercy invite you to it? every affliction call upon and tell you that God expects it?

5. If you bear no fruit, you will have no plea for it that will stand you instead, when God shall come to reckon up all his layings out upon you, all the advantages which a day of grace hath afforded you, your mouths will then be stopt, and you will be filled with amazement. Be then advised, and to that end.

1. Avoid all impediments or hindrances. There are many which offer themselves, from Satan, from the world, from your own hearts; as will be more particularly instanced hereafter; if you nourish these, they will prevent your bearing fruit to God, it therefore concerns you to oppose them, and to be careful not to expose your selves to them.

2. Improve all the advantages that are offered to you in Gods Vineyard. There are many and great, as we have observed; but it is not enjoyment but improvement that makes them serviceable unto us, use the *price that is in your hands*, work whilst the day lasts, set your selves to seek and serve God:
 this

this is the way to be Plants of renown, and
accepted of him.



SERMON IV.

DOCTRINE II.

God doth particularly and curiously look after every one that lives under the means of grace, to see whether they bear fruit accordingly.

HE not only looks after the places in general where his Gospel is enjoyed, and he hath a visible Church, with a more critical eye than he doth other places; but this Observation, and exact inspection of his extends to every individual there: he so looks after every one, as if there were but that one and no more to set his observation upon. God is here compared to a curious and provident Husbandman, who, having a vineyard, is often in it, and walks from tree to tree at every season, and takes a full view of

of each, to see how it sprouts, buds, blossoms, sets for fruit, &c. not omitting of one.

Here three things may be enquired after,

1. What is this curious observation of God?

2. How it appears that he doth this by every individual?

3. Why he so doth?

1. What is this curious observation which God makes?

A. We may come at something of this in the following Conclusions.

1. That there is an essential *Omnipresence* of God with all his creatures. This is one of the Divine Attributes or perfections which belong to God; it belongs to his prerogative, and is fully and frequently ascribed to him in the Scripture. Because he is an Infinite, Immense and Uncomprehended Being, he must needs therefore be every where: because place cannot contain him, he must of necessity contain all place: hence that, *1 Kings 8. 27. behold, the Heaven, and Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee*; the Heaven of Heavens, is the third Heaven, which is the utmost limit of place, and there is none beyond it: hence there is no getting away from him, or absconding ourselves any where, where he is not, *Psal, 139. 7, &c.*

2. Hence it follows that he must certainly be *Omniscient*. If he be every where, he must

must needs know every thing. Not only doth God assume this Attribute to himself, but it also is necessarily inferred from his Omnipresence. We are to conceive of God under the Notion of an Intelligent Being; knowledge is therefore ascribed to him; and that not in the concrete only but in the abstract, without an Hyperbole, *Prov. 8. 14. I am Understanding*, wheresoever then God is, he is there by his knowledge: his knowledge is his Being, and must be Inseperable from it; and, because his perfections are himself, and he is an undivided Being, where he is, there he is in all his Attributes; although he makes the manifestations of them to the Creatures according to his Pleasure.

3. This Omniscience of God must needs comprize in it a distinct knowledge of all Creatures in particular, and all their actions. Universal Understanding cannot be Confined meerly to Universal or to Generals, but it must reach to individuals; and that not meerly as to their beings or natures, but their actions too; none of these must be hid from him; nay it saith that he minds, regards, takes particular notice of them; he is for this reason said to count them, *Job. 31. 4* and to be acquainted with them, *Psal. 139. 13*. And this knowledge is extended to the most secret things, even the Hearts

of men, which are very deep; the *thoughts* which others can hardly guess at; we are then assured that there is no *hiding of Coun- sel from him*. God is all Eye, & that eye is fixt upon all things, and therefore is said to *behold* them, and look upon them *Psal. 33.*

13. 14.

4. Hence God cannot, in propriety of speech, be said to know one thing more than another; or to observe one thing more intently than another; if we consider this observation as it is in God, it cannot be more or less, intended or remitted; for God doth all things like himself, he is the same God; he cannot know or see one thing more distinctly or clearly than another; all things come equally under his cognizance; he is no more intimately acquainted with the things in Heaven, than with those in hell; his actual knowledge of all must be infinite, and in that which is infinite, there are no degrees; All Beings are comprehended in him, *Acts 17. 28.* and therefore intimate acquaintance with them all belongs to him: yea and all Beings are to be improved by him for his glory; he must therefore know them thoroughly, and all their motions, that so he may not miss of his glory by them.

5. There are yet some persons and things in which God will have more of his declarative glory to shine forth than in others: it

is Gods declarative glory which is his last end in all his works; and he will be glorified in them all; yet not in all alike: some things he will be more seen in than others; he hath not put into all things a like capacity of representing his perfections: he hath not laid out so much upon some as he hath done upon others; and therefore he doth not look for so much from those as from these: he hath given to some creatures a more excellent being, and endued them with more noble Faculties, and they have *larger capacities*, *Joh. 35. 9, 10.* he providentially bestows more advantages and helps on some than he doth upon others; and he will be no loser by any thing that he doth, he will either receive, or recover more from them, *Luk. 12. 48.*

6. This glory of his is most of all concerned in his (Vineyard) or Church: there is a glory which he will have by irrational creatures, *his works shall praise him*; but there is a special glory that he will have by men; hence there are the great Attributes of his Justice and Grace are concerned about them, and must be made to shine out in them; but among men, there are some whom he hath a more special respect to: all are under the conduct of special Government, and to be led to be everlasting monuments of his glory: but he hath a peculiar people among these, a selected number gathered out of these, whom
he

he hath done more for, and expects more from, and will have more honour in & by the result, and these are his Church: here he most of all manifests himself, and they are to be molded into a Church to shew forth his glory, *I/a. 43. 21.*

7. Hence he is said, after the manner of men, to have a special inspection over these: because he lays out more upon them, and expects more from them; he is therefore said to look more peculiarly after them: as one which has a plat of ground planted with choice plants; and on which he lays out more than ordinary cost, will he not expect more from it, & be more curious in observing of it, and all the plants there growing; and takes but little care of the rest of his ground in comparison of what he doth for this; God is therefore said to know them after a peculiar manner, *Amos 3. 2.* is said to wink at the other, to suffer them to go on in their ways, as if he were careless or not concerned about them; but for his vineyard, to be looking there for grapes, to be visiting it, and coming again and again to it.

2. *How it appears that he doth thus by every individual?*

A. Besides the consideration, of what hath been already mentioned, that Gods all-knowledge respects all individuals, both persons & actions, and that God hath a special glory that

that he is concerned for in his visible Church below ; these things are to be observed.

1. That God doth particularly and personally either Commend or Reprove these. It is not only his Church in General, not these and these bodies of Professors, that he so expresseth himself unto, but to persons also. An evident instance for this we have in *Cain* and *Abel*; *Gen. 4. Begin.* And this is intimated by Christ in another Parable, *Viz.* of the Wedding Supper, where the Lord observed that one person that had not on the *Wedding Garment*, and treats him accordingly. If a Church do well in General, yet if it hath within it such as do otherwise, and provoke God, he tells them of such, and reproveth them for suffering them, *Rev. 2. 14. 20.* If the visible Church be gone to decay, and there be a *Noah* in it that is righteous, God notes him, and commends him for it: if there be one good Child in *Jereboms* wicked family, he is specified; if there is one cursed *Cham* in *Noah's* family, he hath his brand.

2. That Gods Mercies and Judgments are very signally observable in these ; not only do these respect the Church in general, or this or that particular Church, but these and those individual persons in it. Not only when Gods People do walk closely with him, have they more observable and admirable deliverances conferred upon them ; and when they highly provoke him, do they meet with

more stupendous visitations, and *Come down* *founderfully*; but this is oftentimes apparent in particular persons. Sometimes when the Church is preserved in peace and prosperity, yet particular *Sinners in Zion* are animadverted upon; & thus the *Fig-tree* in the *Text*; when God is bringing of judgments upon the body of a Church, yet there are some who must first have a *mark set upon them*; for their preservation, *Ezek. 9. 3.* And it shall go well with the *Remnant of Jerusalem*: *Baruch* and *Ebedmelech* shall have their lives given them for a prey, when utter desolation is coming upon the whole Land.

3. That God is in Scripture recorded to take notice of such Individuals as men would least think of. Such as we would account to be least of all thought of; God Eies them: the poor and despised in the World, whom men regard not, yet God observes them, and takes notice how they carry it, and he accounts it his great Glory so to do, *Psal. 102. 17.* Such actions also as we might think lay most out of Observation; their secret and retired duties which they are engaged in; let but a *Nathanael* get under a fig-tree to pray, and it shall be recorded: nay so curious is he in his Observation, that there cannot a ear fall from them, but he puts it in his bottle, not

A sigh pass; but he writes it down in his
book *Psal.* 6. 8.

3. Why God takes such a curious and distinct Observation of these, to see what fruit they bring forth?

A. The ground of this will appear if we lay these things together.

1. That which God expects of his Visible Church, is fruit, this hath bin already cleared in the former Doctrine. God would be honoured and served by some in the World; other men pay him no Tribute, bring forth no fruits that he can taste any pleasancy in; he therefore for that end planted his Church that from it he might receive some revenue in the world; that all the world might not *ly in Wickedness*, and nothing but dishonour him, as all the residue of mankind certainly and unavoidably do.

2. Hence God is honoured by his Visible Church proportionably to the good fruits which they bear. This is the proper and only way in the which they can so serve to his praise, as to answer the end of their being a Church. The rest of mankind shall answer his designs upon them, in some other way; for God will have his honour upon all: but except these serve God, *do the works of God*, yield the fruits of Obedience, they live in vain: and consequently, the more careful and constant they are in these services the more honour
they

they bring to God. Every act of true Obedience hath of this in it, when then these are multiplied, God hath great glory by such.

3. The Church consists of individuals, and consequently the honour which God hath by his Church, is by the individuals in it. The Church is an aggregate body, it is made up of particular persons; and the duty of bearing fruit lies upon every one of them: what therefore God expects of his Church is personally expressed, as well as jointly; a Vineyard consists of particular plants; by the bearing of these, the fruitfulness of the Vineyard is known; and the way for the Owner to know, whether it answers its ends, is to go from tree to tree, and see how they bear; and in no other way is he acquainted with the state of the whole. If every one in the Church be faithful to God, that is a faithful Church indeed: so many as there are belonging to it that are otherwise, do make it to come so far short, and to be unto such a degree barren; God therefore observes each, because he will know the state of his Vineyard.

4. These individuals are there planted by his special Providence; men are ready to think that all these things are casual, and meerly eventual, and do not see an higher hand in them; but gracious Souls acknowledge

ledge a peculiar favourable Providence in it. They are *lines* that are here fallen unto them *Psal. 16. 7.* It is a Metaphor taken from the custom among men, in laying out and bounding of mens Allotments. There is therefore a peculiar remark made upon this; *this & that man was born in Zion, Psal 87. 4.* and as there is much of Gods good will displaying of it self to them, in making it their portion to be in his Church, so there is some special aim at his own glory in it, concerning every one; and therefore according to our conception, God is singularly concerned to look after these.

5. God must have glory by them that do not bear, as well as by them that do. That it is awfully true, that all those that are in the visible Church do not yield the fruit expected; will be considered in the next Doctrine; although these do not glorifie God, but come short of it; yet God must not, will not be a loser by them. No man would willingly be a loser by any thing that he doth, if he could help it; God can help it, and he will. But he is not glorified in the one, after the same manner that he is in the other; the one is found to the praise of the glory of his grace, the others are to be made monuments of the Glory of his Justice. The one are made happy in their glorifying God; the others are made miserable by it: it is therefore requisite that God observe, and have a particular know-

Judge of the State of each one, that he may get himself a name in them accordingly, Rom. 9. 22, 23.

6. There are particular and personal rewards that God hath to distribute to men, according to the fruits they bear. These Rewards God stands obliged to in the Covenant Promises and Threatnings; for both of these belong to the Gospel Covenant in which the visible Church is empaled: there is therefore a Day of Judgment appointed, in which Christ will not only sit upon the world, but also upon his Vineyard, in which he will give each one his recompense according as he is found; and this is personal: for, *we must every one of us give an account of himself to God.* In the dispensing of these recompences, God will proceed with men, according to their deeds; *Rom. 2. 6.* and that will be very diversly, *verse 7, 8, 9.* and it is of infinite moment, whether man be adjudged to happiness or misery: and how shall the Judge of all the earth do that which is right in all this, if he do not observe who bear fruit, and who is barren? and the more curious must the observation be, if we consider, that not only fruitfulness and barrenness, but the more fruits there are of either sort, the more recompense is measured. Some bear more than others, and therefore some are to have greater degrees of glory, and others more amazing wrath to fall

upon them; which how should it be, if God did not write all down, and keep an exact account of all actions as well as persons?

U S E I.

For *Information* in two particulars.

1. See here the Atheism of all such as are bold to sin, because they think that God regards them not. For the Heathen, that know not God, thus to do, is not so much to be wondred at; and yet even some of them will rise up in Judgment against us, if we do thus: but for those that are taken so near unto God, as all they are that are in his Church to be guilty of this, is an astonishing thing; whether there be any among us that dare to say it in words, may be questioned; but there are too many whose practices declare them to be directed by these false principles, this is too evident; and indeed, that is the root of all wickedness that is committed among Professors: God himself acquaints us, that hence sprang all the impiety and wickedness of the men of Judah, Ezek. 8. 12. *They say God seeth not*; it may be they did not say it any otherwise but in their hearts? and truly this is little if any thing better than what the fool saith, viz. *There is no God*, Psal. 14. 1. *would those that are of the holy seed per-*
petrate

petrate such abominations as they do? would they that have the name of God called upon them, and that are under the obligations of the Gospel-Covenant, live like Heathen that know not God? would they drive a trade of sin and vanity, were they indeed perswaded that they are under the watchful eye of the great God, which is making dayly remarks upon what they do, and taking a most distinct account of all their actions? surely it could not be. If they thought that the flaming Eye of his Jealousie were looking intently upon them, it would make them afraid of doing such things as they do,

3. Learn hence also the unspeakable folly of Hypocrisie. Such as make an high profession, and pretend to be flourishing trees in the Vineyard; but mean while think to put God off with leaves instead of fruit; or fruits which though they seem fair to the eyes of men, are yet rotten at the core: Do such men think to impose upon him? no, they deceive their own Souls, but *God is not to be mocked*, he looks too curiously to be made to take a tree that is only full of leaves, for one that is full of fruit. It is fruit that he is seeking for, and he will discern whether there be any there or no: and he knows how to distinguish good fruit from bad: his Vineyard brought forth *gr p's*, but what then? possible they were fair to look upon,

but they were indeed *sowre and wild*, and he discovered it, and thereupon condemned it, as if it had born nothing at all; men may do a great many things that are like Obedience for the matter of them. But if they have not the right principle: are not the product of saving grace in the soul, Gods curious eye will discover the difference, and what profit will they yield when he shall reject them, and profess that he takes no pleasure in them?

U S E II.

Let this be for a word of solemn warning to all that are in the visible Church, to beware of barrenness there, and what greater caution can there be set before Christians, than the consideration that God looks after every one of them, to see how they behave themselves in pursuit of the profession which they have made? for certainly God is not an idle spectator; and this will hereafter be made awfully to appear. Think what a shame it is to be in the Vineyard, and yet to be unfruitful; and then add to think, that the Lord of the Vineyard sees this, and will let us sooner or later know that he sees it too; and can it be for our comfort to be so found and charged by him in the day of accounts? do not your own Consciences sometimes reflect and accuse you, and

tell you how unworthily you carry it, under all the care and husbandry that is laid out upon you? now when they so do, add to say as the Apostle, 1 Joh. 3. 20. if our own heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things: But,

U S E III.

To quicken and encourage us all in our-endearments after fruitfulness. Doth God take such particular notice of each of us? let every Christian carry this thought upon his own heart, & make it an incentive and engagement to him, to endeavour to answer Gods ends in this respect: And there are these three things which this thought should engage and excite us unto.

1. To see that we bring forth good fruit. If God be so curious, let it make us to be so too. They that would approve themselves to an all-seeing and heart searching God, had need to take heed to themselves, and beware of being imposed upon. God not only looks whether we hear, but what we hear; let us do so too: and here let us know, that the tree must be made good, if ever the fruit be good: grapes are not gathered of thorns. It should make all that call themselves Christians, to be afraid of living one day in a state of unregeneracy; for as long

long as we so do, we do nothing at all that will turn to account. See that you have a principle of Grace within, and then take heed that your lives be the continued exercise of it,

2. To take care that we bear much fruit. When you have gotten grace into your Hearts, let it be your industrious endeavour to bring it forth into action through your whole life and Conversation. The best of us have another Law in our Members, which will be putting it self forth, and doing of such works as must be burnt up; Grace must be carefully Nourished and Excited, else it will be born down and suppressed by the Carnal part within us.

3. To be sure to bring forth secret fruits. Here is the least danger of Hypocrisy. We may do many things which a love of Applause & Commendation from men may excite us to; but our secret service, which is done out of the reach of the eye and observation of others, is that which is in the least danger of deceiving us; because herein we have better evidence that we set God before us: and that you may be truly thus engaged, here is your help; to be always thinking, God is now at my right hand, his eye is upon me, and there are these three Motives which the Doctrine before us affords, to put us

as upon Carefully and Cheerfully doing thus.

1. If God sees, he will approve us if we thus do. He looks with great Approbation upon the Faithful Endeavours of his Children; it pleaseth him highly to see them engaged for him and his glory in all that they do. And what should please or satisfy us more or better, than that the God we profess to serve, takes Content in our Duties, and *Smells a sweet savour in them?*

2. Thus only shall we answer the end of our being planted in Gods Vineyard. The reason why God looks so exactly, is, as we heard, because he would not miss his end; that if we answer it not one way, he may have it of us in another: And remember, if we do thus, it is the way for us to be continued in the Vineyard, and have ~~the~~ constant influences of his Grace; for *to them that have, more shall be given*; God will not be wanting to us, if we take heed to be faithful to him in our improvements, and therefore,

3. We shall not lose our labour. For if God observes in particular, then he will not forget to reward us in particular. There is a great recompense promised to them that are faithful, and it is a strong consolation to all such as are so, to consider that he who hath

hath thus promised, keeps the account of all the care and fidelity of his people, even to the most secret Duty which they do in sincerity; and our Saviour hath given us this Assurance, *That our father that seeth in secret will reward us openly.*



SERMON V

DOCTRINE III.

THere are those that are planted in the visible Church, that bear no fruit.

This is a necessary inference from the owners Coming to this fig-tree, looking for fruit, and finding none, for if God be aimed at in this owner, as we have observed, he could not miss, or not find fruit, if there had bin any; Being omniscient. And though there be but one tree named, (as in the other parable of the man without a wedding garment, there is

one mentioned which is enough to intimate that such a thing may be, and so sufficient to put every one upon self-examination; yee it is certian that it intimates that there are more.

In the clearing up of this Doctrine we may consider,

1. The evidence that there are such.
2. Who are so to be accounted?
3. How this comes to pass.
4. Why God suffers such in the visible Church.

1. For the evidence that there are such; nay more, that the biggest part of visible Professors are for the most part such, we have warrant sufficient from the Scripture to conclude: nor do we find that the visible Church was ever without such since the beginning. In *Adams* family there was a *Cain* who offered unaccepted Sacrifice. In *Noah's* a Cursed *Cham*, whom the deluge had not washed from his wickedness. *Abraham* had a scoffing *Ishmael*, and *Isaac* a profane *Esau*. When *Israel* were in the Wilderness, and were accounted Holiness to the Lord, yet there was many a vile wretch discovered, and a mixt multitude always rebelling against God. What they were afterwards, Gods frequent complaints by his Prophets, do sufficiently discover. How it was with his vineyard, we see, *Isa. 5. begin.* And the application of it we have, *verse. 3.* and if we we shall descend

to Gospel times, we shall find it so; *Christ* himself when he was here, had a *Judas* in his own family; and what do the warnings and predictions of the Apostles signify, but that there were too many of these in the primitive Churches? and they warn us of worse and more degenerate times to come afterwards, but this will be most evidently discovered to us in the Consideration of the next thing; viz.

2. Who are so to be accounted?

A. In general, all those that do not bear the right and proper fruit, will come under this denomination; and those are only the fruits of Righteousness and Holiness; all others are in Gods esteem barren: whatsoever fruits they bear to themselves, if they bring forth none to God, they are Empty *Hf.* 10. 1. The fruits that God looks for in his Church are good works, acts of true Obedience to his revealed will; and to the making of such fruit there is a great deal required. It is necessary that the tree be good before the fruit can be so. Besides the matter of the action, that it be conformable to the Rule of Gods word, there must be a principle of grace within from whence it must proceed, and saving Faith in the Soul to purify the heart, and to work by love, without which it is impossible to please God, *Hbr.* 11. 6. and it must be in conjunction with a sincere aim

as the glory of God, as the ultimate scope of the action. It must be a work of the Sanctifying Spirit, and that it cannot be, if it fail of any of these ingredients; and hence in particular we may conclude, such as these to bear none; viz.

1. All *Profane* persons that are in the visible Church; and it is a matter of sad lamentation, that there are too many such, who call themselves Christians, and yet are always doing the works of the flesh, of which we have a Catalogue, Gal. 5. 19, &c. they mind nothing that is good, but are wholly addicted to vanity and debauchery, and yet they can boast of their Church-priviledges, and bolster themselves up in wickedness by them: such were they, Jer. 7. 9, 10. the very lives and conversations of these declared them to be graceless, Isa. 3. 9. the cursed fruits that they bear discover that they have an evil root of bitterness in them; and charity must put out its eyes, before it can think better of them: God will never acknowledge the vintage of Gomorrah to be fruit.

2. All *Hypocrites*. These indeed make a shew as if they were green trees, and are full of the leaves of an outward profession: they carry it fair to men, and make a great stir in a profession, talk much of Religion, and frequent Ordinances with a great deal of seeming zeal; they are very good Christians

as far as words will go; and possibly too they may have a shew of fruit upon them: they may do a great many things so far as the matter of duty reacheth, and in that part of their conversation which lies open to the view and observation of men, may use much severity and strictness: but these are not the fruits that God accepts; they are not sound but rotten. Our Saviour compares them to *Sepulchres*, *Mat. 23. 27, 28*: These trees are not good, how then should their fruit be so? However they hope to recommend their lives to men, they do not approve their hearts to God: they labour, but it is to make a *Spiders web*: their aims are wrong set; they seek not the glory of God, but to be seen of men; and they have all their reward when they have gotten the applause they desired, for God will reject them.

3. *All Legallists*. I distinguish these from *Hypocrites*; because the other are meet stage-players and dissemblers, whereas these are real and conscientious in what they do; they have an enlightened Conscience in them, and moral principles that are active, and they are led by them. The duties of first, and second Table are carefully practised by them, and yet not, as the others to be seen of men meerly, but to answer their Consciences, and to earn Heaven and Happiness: they are built upon the Old Covenant,

stant, and hope to comply with the termes of it: or they make the Gospel but a Covenant of works, and think that if they do their best, God will accept them, and this maketh them very laborious: but still, all this is not fruit, it needs something to make it of the right kind; it is wrought by their own strength, and will prove loise. of this stamp was *Paul in his Pharisaism*, but see what an esteem he set upon this afterwards, *Phil. 3. 4 &c.*

4. In a word, all that are in a state of *Unregeneracy*. As long as men have no principle of saving grace wrought in them by the Spirit of God, they do not bear fruit; where there is no faith, there can be no exercise of it; and whatsoever is not influenced by that, belongs to dead works; that which is such, is pleasing to God, he takes content in it; but these can do no such thing. *Rom. 8. 8. They that are in the flesh cannot please God*; and the Apostle assures us that *all have not faith*.

3. How this comes to pass? It may seem strange that there should be empty plants in the Courts of Gods House, but we may be satisfied in this, when we have weighed the case: Hence;

Ans. 1. *Negatively.* It is not because there is any thing wanting on Gods part as to means of fruitfulness. God can leave this

to mens own Judgments, if they will speak up-
rightly, *Isa. 5. 3. 4.* There are the same ad-
vantages afforded to one and the other in the Vi-
sible Church: they enjoy the same Gospel, and
Ordinances, in which the Calls, Counsels, Invi-
tations, Encouragements, are alike exhibited to
them: the dresser of the Vineyard hath a
charge given him concerning all, to look after
them with care: the Ministry are appointed to de-
clare the whole counsel of God: they that bear
no fruit live under the same means that they do
who bear the most; and there is nothing more
done mediately for one than another. It is the
same word that Convincth one and prejudgeth
another; there is nothing is here to be said for
it.

2. Positively; let these things be ob-
served,

1. There is a natural barrenness unto good
in all *Adams* Posterity. Man indeed was
made at first in the Image of God, which was
a fertile principle in him, and both enabled
and disposed him to the Service of God; but
the fall hath lost him that power, and as he
comes into the world in a state of Apostasy,
he could do nothing at all that is accepta-
ble to God; his soul is become such a soil,
as no good plant will grow in it; it will
bring forth nothing but thorns and thistles.
Mans impotency to holy duties, is one part
of the misery fallen upon him by sin; and

It is such as hath left him neither ability nor disposition to it, *Rom. 3. 12. &c.* for if a man must be good in order to his being capable of doing good, the natural man is capable of doing none: for he is *Conceived in sin, & goes astray from the Womb, speaking lies.*

2. There are also Cursed Principles of Corruption in natural men, that help to encrease this barrenness. Original sin in man is not merely morally Privative, or a disabling of man from doing good, by emptying him of the Grace which he had at the first; but there is something Morally positive in it too, *i. e.* all the Moral powers of his Soul are habitually bent unto sin, *his Heart is set in him to do Wickedly, Eccl. 8.*

11. So that he can as well withhold from acting as from sinning; and by these renewed acts of such a principle, the habit is fortified, which adds to the barrenness of the Soul a deeper rooting and confirmation in it; and nature, being strengthened by custom, is yet made more unlikely to do any thing that may answer Gods expectation: it is more settled in it's evil way: and therefore God puts stress upon this argument, *Jer. 13. 23. 9. d.* Whatever might have bin hoped before, yet now they are next to hopeless.

3. Hence their Hearts do naturally and voluntarily resist the Spirit of God, striving with

With them in the means. Instead of complying with and entertaining of him, they do oppose him, and this men always do of themselves or by their own inclinations, *Acts.*

7. 51. The *way of mens Hearts*, and the *sight of their eyes*, to which they are addicted, and that by a rooted approbation and choice, are quite contrary to the things that the Spirit of God invites men to in the Word and Ordinances; so that wheresoever he comes to make offers of them unto men, he finds a fixed enmity in them against these things, so that such not only will not, but they *cannot be subject* *Rom. 8. 7.* This is the *lust*, that *lusts against the spirit*, and needs must it be exceeding strong in natural men since in the regenerate, the remains of it often brings them into *Captivity*, and so it makes them that they *cannot do the things that they would*, *Gal. 5. 17.*

4. There is also many times a great neglect in Parents of doing their Duty to their Children, in order to their being fruitful. They love to have Church Priviledges for their Children; they cannot bear that they should not be acknowledged Christians, and not have the badge of Christs Covenant upon them; but alas! this is all they mind; how woful neglects of Duty are there in such Parents? they do not teach their Children the *Principles of the Oracles of God*, do

not counsel and *command them to serve God*; do not restrain them from the exorbitances that their youthful carnal minds naturally incline them to, do not set them a good example of Holiness, but often give them an ill example; do not pray with them, nor see that they attend upon the means of grace, and give an account of their profiting: and Children thus left, will run after sin fast enough; and God also thus punisheth Parents neglects.

5. They oftentimes fall into Snares and Temptations from Satan and his Instruments. The Devil hath a peculiar Design upon the Church of Christ; the *gates of hell* set themselves against it: where the means of grace are most clearly dispensed, and the best endeavours are used to bring Souls unto Christ, Hell is most of all alarmed, and Satan useth all manner of stratagems to hold such in his hands; and if, whilst they are visibly Christs, he can keep them spiritually his own, his ends are answered. He hath also his Agents, leud persons, whom he employs, to tempt, allure, and draw men away, especially young persons, into vain company, to evil practices, and such things as may keep them from seriousness, and engage them to the lusts of their own hearts; and if any word comes close to their Consciences at any time, these *Fowls readily pick it up.*

8. There is often a Judicial Blinding and Hardning falls upon them, by Gods righteous Judgment, God affords them rowzing and awakening means, and they sleep under them, and harden their hearts against them, and will not comply with his calls and counsels, and God hereupon sends them a penal hardness, whereby they are confirmed in it, so it was with them, *Psal. 81. 11, 12.* and such an one fell upon them, *Deut. 29. 4.* yea this was the amazing errand which God told the Prophet that he sent him upon, *Isa. 6. 9, 10.* and how can such bear fruit, when Christ saith to them as he did to the fig-tree, *Never more let fruit be found on thee?* Now all these things may satisfie us how it may so be, that all the means may fail, as to mens being fruitful under the enjoyment of them. But then the question still remains, *viz.*

4. Why God suffers such in his visible Church? this may also seem a mystery. That he sees, and knows them, yea observes them we have heard; and that they do not answer his expectation, and for that reason must needs be a provocation to him: why then should he let them be there?

A. In general; God knows how to advance his Glory, and gain his ends by them in thus doing. Gods last end in all he doth is his own glory, he hath a name to get by his works; and there are various ways in which

which he promotes it. As there are diverse Attributes which he displays to us, so there are divers Subjects in which he will have them exalted, and whatsoever serves to the exaltation of these, proportionably to the cost that is laid out upon it, is not in vain; now that God both can and will do so in this affair, will be more particularly seen in the consideration of these things.

1. God hereby declares his great *Patience*. This is one of the Perfections of God, which he sets an high price upon; he tells us that he is a God that bears, and forbears, and *endures sinners with much long-suffering*; and it mightily commends him to the souls of his people that he is so; the discoveries which they make of it, are to them matter of great encouragement; and in none is it more evidently made to appear, than in these: that fruitless trees should be let alone in the Vineyard, and have all the protection and husbandry of it afforded to them; and though still they abide barren, yet they are not presently cut down, but suffered there, this is great patience. It is nothing so much to bear with a wicked world, that have not these means; these are therefore called *The Riches of Gods Goodness*, Rom. 2. 3.

2. Hereby he discovers the great wickedness which is in the hearts of men; it would never have been known how vile men are, if they had

not lived under the means of grace. And thereby been waited upon with all the offers of grace, & endeavours with them for their good. For men to Transgress in a Land of Uprightness, to sin against all the counsels, warnings, invitations, encouragements, obligations, of the Gospel, is the top of wickedness; and this mightily clears up the righteousness of the Judgment of God against ungodly men.

3. This also discovers to his people evidently, that it is by Grace that they are saved. Godly men have by this means before them continually such monuments as the very looking on them, helps to convince them that it is not of themselves, but the gift of God, that they are made fruitful; when they see them of the same nature with them, under the same dispensations, notwithstanding all to abide in their impenitency, and live unprofitably under all the advantages of profiting; it tells them what hearts and natures they have in them, and how much they owe to the praise of Gods Grace, that hath made them to differ.

4. Hereby these also are prepared to be the more eminent instances of Gods Reverend Justice. Not only Gods Grace, but his Justice too, are to be eminently exalted in the visible Church: here are to be found the more stupendous monuments of his severity, where his mighty works have been done, and men have not repented; it is not so much in

Tyre and Sidon, as Chorazin, &c. not so much in *Sodom* or *Capernaum*. These are they who by their despising and abusing the greatest mercies of God, do lay up the more *treasures of wrath* against themselves; and therefore, when Christ comes to Judgment, there is a peculiar vengeance, is to be taken upon such, *2 Thes. 1. 8.*

5. Sometimes God doth it for *Gracious Ends*, to make the more convincing displays of his rich *Grace* in them. God sometimes suffers barren trees to grow a long while in his Vineyard, till one would think that all the hopes of their bearing were now past; and they have bin dying and rotting so long till we were almost concluding them to be past recovery and after this he comes and Magnifies his Mercy upon them, in recovering of them by a saving conversion, and they are, as it were, *born out of time*. Such an one *Paul* tells us he was: and by this means the great efficacy, and mighty influence of his grace, comes to be made known, and his name is praised, by and for them.

U S E I.

Learn hence, that visible-Church Membership give to no man security of his Salvation, it is therefore a vain thing for any man to
boast

boast of, or put their confidence in it : and yet alas ! how many are there who so do ? It is only those that have the fruits of the Spirit on them, that glorify God by faith in Christ, and *a well-ordered Conversation*, that shall see his salvation. Men indeed who are in the visible Church have opportunities and great helps thus to do ; but it is not the unfailing privilege of all that are there so to do : they have means, but they despise and neglect them, and so they are never the better. If this be a truth, that there may be barren fig-trees in Gods vineyard ; it then necessarily follows, that men may belong to the number of Gods visible Church, and enjoy all the outward advantages of it, and yet after all that, fall short of eternal life, and come under condemnation : and this should shake the carnal security of all such as cry,
The Temple of the Lord.

U S E II.

This Doctrine then should call us all to a more careful self-examination. The very hearing of it may stir up every one of us to reflect upon our selves, and say to our own Souls, how is it with me ? what fruits do I bear ? I am a plant in the vineyard ? I make a profession, but what do I do ? wherein do

Can I answer Gods just demands of me? If I am in the Orchard, I should bear then, but do I? when Christ told his Disciples that *one of them should betray him*, how did it put them all upon solemn enquiry? every one said, *is it I?* If I should only say that there is one in the Congregation, of whom it is true, that when God looks for fruit on him, he finds none; it might rouse every one: but let me tell you, I am afraid there are a great many such, and it may be of them that make a fair shew too, and pretend high: well, what doth it speak to you, but that you should bring your selves upon the tryal; and to that end, labour to inform your selves what is fruit, and what is not, and accordingly search into your hearts and ways, and see how it is with you. Of what moment it is for you thus to do, you will see when we come to consider the doom of the barren fig-tree expressed in the sequel.

SECTION III.

And let it awake: all to see to our selves that we be fruitful. Look to your selves that you be really engaged in the Service of God, and doing of his works: the thought that we may be barren in this regard, should make us the more careful to look to our selves, that we be not so: is

concerns every individual to do so for himself & there are these three arguments that should move us hereunto.

1. Consider that God expects fruit of every one in his Church. He looks for it, & you can no otherwise answer the end of your being set there. This hath been already evidenced, and it hath a mighty plea in it; for doth not God deserve it of you? Is it not an ill requital of all his care and cost laid out upon you, to deny it to him? is it not the most unreasonable thing that you should stand within the fence, and take up room in the ground, and be of no profit at all?

2. And God observes as well as expects: and should not this be a consideration of weight with you, to think that whatever I am doing, Gods jealous eye is upon me: if I am barren, he keeps the account of that, and if I am fruitful, he will not forget that: He that knows that he is always under the watchful inspection of the great God, had need to be careful of himself.

3. And if you be not fruitful, he will not always bear it: and this your very reason may assure you of: though he be patient, yet he can be weary with forbearing: and this is a solemn consideration, & should carry great aw in it to all our hearts, you cannot promise your selves always to be indulged, unless good-
ness

ness leads you to repentance. And for your help here.

1. Be sensible of your native barrenness, and go to God to remove it: sense of impotency is the first step to profitableness: A proud opinion of our own righteousness, is the main *remora* to our Conversion. God only *can teach us to profit*; when a barren heart is felt, and burdensome, he is ready to afford his help to all those that come to him, and pray against it.

2. Beware of hearkning to Satan, and resisting the Spirit of God. This is the undoing of multitudes under the Gospel; Satan enveagles them with his Temptations, and they comply with them: the Spirit of God comes and solicits them, and they regard him not. Hearken to him, and he will *work your works in and for you*.

3. Improve the means with diligence. The means of Grace are sutable, but if they be neglected they will not profit us. Hearken to Counsel, take warning, receive instruction, embrace the Encouragements given you, and apply all to practice.

U S E IV:

Let this afford a solemn word of Advice to Parents. It is a favour of God to you, that

that your Children are in the Vineyard : but rest not in it, God hath made it your duty to endeavour that they may be trees of renown there ; your families should be nurseries for the Church of God ; and it is an Office that you bear, to dress the nursery that is under your charge ; if you neglect it, and your Children thereupon prove to be unprofitable and *wild Olives, briars* instead of *Fig-trees*, it will be a Righteous Judgment of God upon you ; and they also will have reason to accuse you another day, Be quickned to your Duty ; they will not bear of themselves, pains must be taken, and though the blessing depends upon God, yet he is wont to conferr it upon us when we are in the faithful use of the means.



SERMON VI

*Verse 7. Then said he unto the Dresseſſer of his Vineyard; behold, theſe threſ years I come ſee-
king fruit of this fig-tree, and find none, cut it
down, why ſtandeth it the ground.*

III VVE now proceed to conſider the
deliberation of the Owner of
the Vineyard with the dresseſſer of it; in which
there are two things.

1. The complaint which he makes against
this Particular fig-tree.
2. The advice which he gives to him a-
bout it.

The Person spoken to is called the Dresseſſer
of the Vineyard. Men were wont often to
keep their Gardeners, to look after their
vines and fruit-trees, that were skilled in
that sort of Husbandry: and this cannot be
meant of God, whom else-where Christ call-
eth The Husbandman, Joh. 15. 1. for it hath
been

been already observed that he is intended by the Owner. Some apply this to Christ, unto whom there is given a Mediatorial Dispensation of all affairs that concern his Church: but I rather suppose that it aims at the Ministry of the Gospel, whom it is certain that Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and Planter of this Vineyard, employs in the manuring of his visible Church: they are therefore said to be *Planters* and *Waterers*, 1 Cor. 3. 6. and to be *Labourers together with God*, chap. 4. 1.

Before I proceed to the consideration of the deliberation it self, give me leave to make a few brief glancing remarks, upon the persons deliberated withal, viz the *Dresser of the vineyard*. And here we may observe;

1. *The dignity which Christ puts upon his Ministry, and the trust which he puts in them.* It is a great honour that is done unto men to put them into places of trust. God hath a singular respect to, and care which he takes of his Church; to betrust any then with the office of looking after and dressing of this Vineyard, argues a great deal of confidence that he puts in them, and honour that he confers upon them. God is a great King, and these are his Children, for to them *pertains the Adoption*; and it is a noble employment to be made Tutors to a King's Children: men are wont to be curious in their

choice of such: and God is much more, in the directions which he hath given about the qualifications of such whom he will accept in this station. *Moses* mentions it as a great preferment which God had advanced *Korah* and his Brethren unto, *Numb.* 16. 9.

1. Hence they who despise the office and work of the Ministry, despise God. Such as reproach them, reproach God himself. It is not to be denied, but that there are those who are preferred among men to the place of the Ministry, whose unworthy Carriage in it, and mismanagement of it, makes them deserve to be exploded, and not acknowledged to be called by God, or approved of him: but this ought not to be interpreted as redounding to the ignominy of the work it self, or the contempt of those whom God hath made faithful in it. It is true, Christ could do his work without them, but he hath pleased to chuse this way to dispense himself in; and that employment which God himself hath seen meet to put honour upon, ought not to be vilified or thought light of, by such as profess themselves to be his people, and to hope for his salvation.

2. We are here also acquainted with the Duty of Gospel Ministers. The Title here put upon them, is not only a character of their dignity, but of their duty too. Their work

work is to dress the Vineyard: The word signifies *one that is to work about the vines*; i.e. to do the business that appertains to the tending and looking after them: and this intimates that there is no little care and charge lying upon those that are engaged in the Ministry, no little labour incumbent on them to be exercised withal; and this will appear from the consideration of two things in the Comparison or Title.

1. A Vineyard hath a great many plants in it, all of which belongs to the Vine-dressers care, and every one of which calls for dressing. A Church is a Company of visible believers, or professors, with their Children, in some there are more, in others fewer; now each individual of these belongs to his Charge; and it is a solemn Charge that Christ hath laid upon him, *2. Tim 4. begin* A Seasonable administration belongs to these and to that end, care is to be used to *know the state* of the Vineyard; and that is by the several plants which are in it. Not only Truths, but seasonable Truths are to be preached; and he that hath souls to look after, must needs have a great care lying upon him.

2. There is a deal to be done to and for the Vineyard, and the several plants that are in it. He that hath a Vineyard to look after, shall never want work; there

are so many things that belong to the dressing & tending of it ; there is digging, & dunging, and weeding, and transplanting, & pruning, and under-setting, and keeping up the hedge, and watching against wild beasts and robbers : and all this is a constant work ; if it be once done, it will be to do again and again. There is no less lying on the Ministers of Christ, if they will prove themselves faithful : there are *Children*, tender plants in the nursery, to be looked after, and to be removed from those beds into the rows, when they are fitted for it ; there are *grown persons*, who should be laboured with that they may be prepared for full communion : and there are those that have *attained* to it : each of these have their portion to be allotted to them. There are the *unbelieving*, who are to be called upon and not let alone ; the *Obstinate*, who are to be solemnly warned ; the *Scandalous*, who are to be, according to their merit, censured ; the *Careless*, that are to be seasonably reproved ; the *Sorrowful*, that must be comforted ; the *doubting Souls*, that must be satisfied ; &c. there is the Word and Ordinances which are to be dispensed to all in publick ; the *sick* that must be visited ; *Corrupters and Seducers* must be watched against ; Families in private must be visited ; &c. and an account is to be given in to Christ the Lord and Owner of his Church :

of all this, as they expect a reward of Grace at his hands : and if they have wilfully neglected or omitted their duty in these regards, they are in danger of being cut in sunder by him, and made to receive their portion with Hypocrites.

U S E I.

Hence how much do they mistake who think the work of the Ministry to be an easy employment ? Many there be that undervalue it, and account it a small matter : and so to those in this Office who give occasion to have it so thought, by their supine negligence : who with the Sluggard, let their Field be grown over with nettles, for want of care and tendance. But certainly, they that with any conscience study their Duty, and endeavour to be as much as they can in the discharge of it, find it to be far otherwise. Paul thought the care of the Churches, to be more than all the trouble and difficulty that he met with otherwise, 2 Cor. 11. 28. well then might he in the serious contemplation of it cry out, who is sufficient for these things ? certainly, without a great deal of special assistance from the Spirit of God, they cannot in any competent measure discharge their duty acceptably : it would be a burden too heavy for an Angel to stand up under ; what then is a weak man to undertake

undertake it & well might *Moses*, and *Jeremiah* decline it, and had not God himself promised to be with them, it had been madness in them ever to have engaged in it. That promise of Christ to his Disciples, was very necessary and seasonable to back his solemn Charge he had given them withal, *Mat. 28. 19, 20.*

U S E II.

Pity and pray for, and encourage Christ's Ministers in their work. They need no mans envy, but every mans compassion, and prayers too: they that are sensible of the weight of duty lying on them, do earnestly desire it of every one that fears God. How often have we *Paul* importunately asking it of the Churches whom he writes unto? little do you know the fore Temptations, mighty discouragements, and many sinking thoughts which these Servants of Christ struggle withal; through sense of their own frailty, and the greatness of the work incumbent on them, and the solemnity of the Charge under the aw whereof they are; and the trembling thoughts of the amazing account they must shortly give in to the Lord Jesus Christ: give them then many a lift, by your ardent supplications for them. One of the Ancients

was wont to say, he often wondred how it was possible that any Minister should ever be saved: and truly, it is rich grace that their hopes can only rely upon. Encourage them in their work; let them know, *That their labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

3. We may here also observe, *That Ministers may be faithful in their places, and yet be unsuccessful.* We find that the Owner of the Vineyard seeing the unfruitfulness of his Fig-tree, finds no fault with the Vine-dresser, lays nothing of it to his Charge; but his whole Complaint and Threatning is against the tree it self. And he would not have treated so familiarly with him, if he had not esteemed him to be faithful: And yet for all this, here is a barren tree in the Vineyard: and we find that if men under the watch of the Ministry do perish through their default, God will require their blood at their hands, *Ezek. 33. 8.* But yet they may do their work conscientiously, and men for all that perish; but now they are quit, *verse.*

9. Here observe;

1. A Minister is then to be acknowledged faithful to his office relation, when he doth conscientiously attend all the duties of it, as he hath opportunity and ability. Fidelity in any duty, of any relation, must be lookt upon in an Evangelical Sense, else the *Lord must cry, Lord enter not into Judgment.*

Faith

Faithfulness appears in a care to mind the work we are in, to discharge the trust reposed in us, to spend and be spent in the work of Christ, and for the good of Souls; to be *instant in season and out of season*? To divide to every one the portion belonging to them, rebuke to whom rebuke, &c. And all this as God gives them strength and advantage, not shunning any thing which God hath Commanded them to do.

2. That there are such placed by Christ in his Church, is evident. The love and care which Christ hath for it, cannot but put him upon it to provide such for it: and when his people have bin never so degenerate, and offered the greatest affronts to such as these, he hath yet sent them, and enabled them to bear all, and discharge their duty notwithstanding: It is he that *thrusts out labourers into his barney*; and he can make them labourers indeed: there have bin such formerly; *Paul* was so, he could appeal to the consciences of his *Ephesians*. *Acts*. 20. 29, 27. and he *hath the residue of the Spirit with him*, Men may put others in, and he may Providentially suffer it, for their punishment; but he hath required all to be such, and all that he sends in mercy are so: there are none without their infirmities, but there are those that are wise, and sincere, and

and diligent, and have his spirit upon them.

3. That these notwithstanding all their faithfulness, may miss of the desired success of their Ministry. This is signified in the Text, and witnessed to by the Scripture, and constant experience; and there may be a rational account given of this, if we consider,

1. That it is not their fidelity, but Gods blessing which gives the success. They are but Instruments used by God: their desires may be sincere, their endeavours hearty, and industrious; but the hearts of men are not to be wrought upon by them, but require Almighty Power to influence them. If they neglect their Duty they deserve blame, but, *tho Israel be not gathered*, if they are faithful, *their work and their recompense is with the Lord*; and they shall be acknowledged by him: they always renounce themselves as to efficacy, only they endeavour to do Service; they *plant and water*, but they *referr the increase to God*, 1 Cor. 3. 5, 6. we have Christ himself complaining that his work was unsuccessful, *Isa. 49. 4.* God dispenseth his grace at his pleasure, *John was a burning and a shining light*, but he was despised. Christ taught as never man did, but *they would not come unto him that they might have life*, *Joh. 5. 40.* and he gives us a reason for it, *chap. 6. 44.*

2. That God sometimes sends his faithful

ful servants on the most unsuccessful errand. The direct end of the Ministry, is the Conversion and Salvation of men; but God sometimes judicially orders it otherwise. What a famous industrious and Evangelical Prophet was *Isaiah*? and yet see how his Commission runs, *Isa*, 6. 9, 10. And when God leaves men to their own lusts and hardness of heart, the most softning means shall harden them the more, and the Gospel whose proper scope is life, shall become a *Savour of death*, 2. Cor. 2. 16. The more is laid out upon them, the worse they grow; and yet even in this too will God be glorified, and his servants shall not lose their reward, they are still a *sweet savour to God*.

U S E I.

Hence it is a hard measure to judge of a Ministers fidelity by his success. There is a Sovereign over-ruling hand of God in these affairs, and it is to be adored by us: to have nothing else to alledge against any of Gods Servants, but that there is little good done by all his labour, and possibly a people do grow worse under it, and therefore he is not true to his trust, and there be nothing else that appears against him, is an Harsh censure, as if they by their own virtue and good

will could make men good when they please. It may be their affliction and sore grief, when it is not their sin; and calls for pity rather than Censure; to see them *casting out the Gospel net* so often, and *toying all night and catching little or nothing*: their hearts have Sorrow enough already, for this they need not to be loaded with more: thus might *Isaiah, Jeremiah Ezekiel, yea and Christ himself* have been censured.

U S E II.

This may teach us not to place too much upon men. It is a fault too frequent, and of dangerous consequence, for us to tarry at Instruments, and either on the one hand to adore them, or on the other to undervalue them. It is true, the Gifts, graces, industry, prudence, which God bestows upon them are to be acknowledged: but *to have any mans person in admiration*, to the contempt of others, as if this must needs be the converting man, and not the other, is to dishonour God, and give away his incommunicable glory to a Creature: nor can we do such men a greater displeasure: *Paul* is as much dissatisfied at them, who said they were for *Paul*, as those that were for *Apollus*; because they put too much respect upon him.

U S E III.

Hence fidelity and not bare success shall be the Ministers trial and crown another day. I confess, that here in this life, they that bring in many to Christ, have abundance of joy, and are highly beloved by them that have experienced saving good by them; and they that comfort few or none, have abundance of grief and sorrow. But when they shall come to stand before Christ's Tribunal, and are to receive their reward, that man shall have no more commendation than this: he did no more for God, though God did more by him: nay, if there be degrees of reward according to what men have done and suffered for Christ, I am sure this man hath done as much, and suffered more: and if this were not the support of the hearts of some of Gods Servants, they would sometimes faint within them, Christ comforted himself with this, *Isa. 49. 5. Though Israel be not gathered, I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord.*

4. We may here finally observe, That God oftentimes signifies his displeasure against unprofitable Professors, to his faithful Ministers. Thus is the Owner of the Vineyard here brought in, deliberating with the Vine-dresser, complaining against, and threatening of the fig-tree.

tree. How God signified his mind of old to his Prophets, is plainly intimated in Scripture, he used to appear to them in *dreams, visions by Angels, &c.* whence their Prophecies were delivered in the *Name of the Lord*: and sometimes they were against the body of the people, when there was a general degeneracy, sometimes against particular persons. How he discovers himself in these respects to his Servants in Gospel-times, since extraordinary Revelations are ceased, may seem to be more difficult to apprehend: only we are told that we have a more sure word of Prophecy: and out of doubt there is still a truth in that which is expressed, *Amos 3. 7.*

Those of Gods servants that have obtained Grace to be faithful, as they are exceeding desirous to do good, so they cannot but be very observant to see what success their labours have; and as to the general state and frame of the people they are sent to, it is practically obvious, by the entertainment they give to, and improvement they make of the means of Grace which are afforded them. As to particulars indeed, there may be some who notoriously discover themselves by their lewd lives, & profligate carriages; others may act more closely, and make a fair shew, when indeed they are unfruitful, and so impose upon their belief and charity; and yet some of these do often ren-

der themselves very suspicious. Now God herein mainly signifies his mind to his Ministers in this respect, not, by telling them this and that in particular is an Hypocrite, & hath no true grace in him ; but he toucheth their hearts with an apprehension of his displeasure, and stirs them up providentially to give warning to his people and tell them of their danger, & to be much & frequent in insisting upon these themes : and it is an observation worthy of remark, that when God is about to manage a Controversie, either more publick, or more personal, there are unaccountable applications in the Ordinances unto such, which oftentimes put men into admiration, and if the reason of this be asked, it may be considered.

1. That God is wont to give Sinners in the Visible Church, fair warning, before he falls upon them in his wrath. It is a privilege of sinners that are under the means of Grace, to be told of their sins and have the denunciations of Gods wrath laid before them, before it seizeth them, that so together with a space to repent, they may have a loud call unto it : and this appertains to the singular long suffering of God, which he extends to such, and will render them the more inexcusable, if at last they by their impenitency force him to make a way for his anger ; he therefore first slays them by the mouth
of

of his Prophets, before he executes his vengeance upon them in his Providence; and because he useth his Ministers as Instruments, by whom he gives these warnings to his people, he therefore moves their hearts to eye and observe, and be deeply affected with the things that give him provocation, and accordingly guides their studies and meditations that way.

2. God often doth it with gracious purposes, sometimes to his Ministers, to quicken them to a more earnest and repeated diligent endeavour for the people, both by interposing with God in their more ardent prayers to him for his Patience, and farther to call upon such, and by more particular and solemn endeavours with sinners to quicken and awaken them to their duty; and by this means, *whether they will hear or forbear*, these will have the more peace in the issue, that they have used their best endeavours to do them good; and if they have any grace in them, such apprehensions will raise it up, and put it upon more than ordinary vigour and improvement, in labouring for and with sinners, whose danger they see and fear. Sometimes to unfruitful sinners themselves, by giving a blessing to such endeavours, and perswading them to hearken to their solemn counsels, and accept of the calls to Repentance, that being rendered fruitful, he may have mercy upon them

and spare them : and when it is so, his spirit
 joins in with, and gives efficacy to the en-
 deavours.

U S E 1.

Let this then be a word of warning to
 all Unprofitable ones. If Gods servants *who*
have obtained Grace to be faithful, are at
 any time spirited and engaged more par-
 ticularly to bear a Testimony against your
 barrenness, and solemnly to declare your
 danger to you, and press the many threat-
 enings of Gods word upon you ; do not you
 slight or neglect it ; count it not a light
 matter, or only a pang of their Zeal ; but
 think with your selves, God hath been
 taking notice of me with a jealous eye, he
 is highly provoked at my so long remaining
 unfruitful, and is now sending me this
 rowzing message to alarm me, and give me
 an opportunity, which if I neglect, I must ex-
 pect some sudden wrath to fall upon me. If
 his servants are thus afraid of his Judge-
 ments coming, well may I, who ly to wo-
 fully open to them, do not say they speak
 at random, of their own heads, or vent
 their passions, or discover their wishes : no,
 If they fear God, they desire the good of
 your souls, and that you may be Saved
 from

from the evil that is coming. expect then that if you do not amend your ways & doings, it will not be long before God will come in earnest, either in some publick visitation or in some personal stroak that he will lay upon you, which will make you to wish that you had hearkned to his voice, in the mouth of his Messengers. If you thus do, and thereupon shake off your vain security and carnal confidence; and, bewailing your barrenness, go to him, who only can do it, to teach you to profit, and set your selves in good earnest to seek and serve him with all your hearts; it shall turn to your account, and God will turn away from his fierce anger. But if you shall notwithstanding this, persist in your evill courses, and say in your hearts, *I shall have peace notwithstanding, & there is no evil nigh: if you say God hath not spoken by them but they declare a vision of their own,* and you go on in your sinful state & ways, neglecting the admonitions thus given you in the name of the Lord; God himself will come out against you in his anger, & by some awful token of his displeasure, make you to know by a dear bought experience, *that there have been Prophets among you.*



SERMON VII

VVE have been considering the Person deliberated with, it follows that we take notice of the deliberation it self: in which as hath been observed, there are two things to be handled distinctly.

1. The complaint of the Owner against this particular fig-tree, in which he gives the ground and reason of the following sentence which he pronounceth.

In which observe,

1. The great pains and patience which he had used with this tree in expectation of its bearing: the Patience is expressed in that he had waited three years upon it, suffering it all this while, in hope that it would bear in so long a time at least. why our Saviour useth the definite number of three, is diversely guessed; some think that he aims at the three years of his publick Ministry, which he had spent in that work, when this Para-
ble

ble was uttered, and the year requested in the following verse, to aim at the fourth current, in which he suffered: others suppose it to aim at the nature of the fig-tree, which, if it be not wholly barren, will bear at least once in three years: and then it intends that God had waited upon the sinner as long as there were, any rational hopes of his receiving good, or profiting; or till there was no apparent remedy, as the Scripture sometimes phraseth it. Not that the day of grace is to be limited to three years, but during Gods pleasure, and his pains is intimated, in that all this while he kept coming and looking; which signifies the frequent reiterated means of grace that are used vvith sinners, and the often applications of the Spirit of God, to them, during the day of Patience.

2. The missing of his expectation after all this; *and find none*: and that is the aggravation of the provocation, that not only at first coming, but after so often coming, it remained still as it was, unfruitful.

3. The emphasis put upon this complaint; *looked*: the word is sometimes used as a note of attention, when some observable thing is pointed at, and therefore it is also often used as a note of *Admiration*, when some strange thing that is to be wondred at is mentioned, *which calls for Astonishment from the Beholders.*

There

There are two Observations lie plain in the words.

DOCTRINE I.

That God keeps an exact account of all the Patience and Pains that he useth with sinners under the Gospel, and the improvement which they make thereof.

Thus is the Landlord here brought in making of particular remarks upon what he had done; and what he had observed.

There are several Propositions contained in this Doctrine, a brief explication of which will serve for the clearing up the Truth contained in it.

PROPOSITION I.

That God useth a great deal of Patience with some sinners under the Gospel. Though he affords them the means of Grace, and they do not presently give them due entertainment, but neglect them, yet he doth not always presently fall upon, and cut them

off from these means, but suffers them to live a great while under them, and waits upon them. Here observe.

1. That the Patience of God is Sovereign and Arbitray. It is an act of his meer good pleasure: as he owes to no sinners a room in his Vineyard, or so much as an offer of Grace; so, upon their neglecting to improve the means, and refusing the offers of Grace made to them, he might righteously take away his Gospel from them, or them from it; and although he would be severe, yet he would be very just. The New-Covenant is a Covenant of Grace, and all that is done for men in it, is therefore free: as he acts his pleasure in chusing who shall be put into the Vineyard, he doth it no less in *determining* their continuance in it.

2. This patience is exerted towards some and not all. As God is Sovereign so he makes use of his Sovereignty, to let us know that he is so. How many are there that are born in places where the Gospel is enjoyed, who never live to years of understanding, to have any offer of Grace made to them; of whom, though God can work his Grace in them by his spirit, and hath given godly parents good reason to hope well concerning them, (but this dispensation is a secret;) yet this is a truth, that they are taken out of the Vineyard, before they are capable of the moral means

means used in it. We find also such to whom the Gospel hath been offered, and at their first refusal of it they have been discarded, *Acts* 13. 45, 46. yea such an injunction Christ laid upon his Disciples, *Mat.* 10. 14.

3. Hence also God useth his pleasure in the timing his Patience to these and those. All that are waited upon have not the same measure of the day of grace, and season for bearing fruit; but some a longer, and some a shorter time, having no other bounds, but his will: nor hath he told any sinners how long it shall be: he would not have any such to presume, but calls all to improve the present time; doth not acquaint them when he will put an end to his Patience if they repent not: some sinners are cut down in their full strength, others are suffered to live and grow old, and all this while God is patient, he bears and forbears, for there is no hour in which they are open not to his displeasure, and giving him provocation to fall upon them in his anger: & there are some whom he will make to experience his *forbearance to the uttermost*, *Rom.* 9. 22.

PROPOSITION II.

That in this day of Patience, God takes a great deal of pains with sinners, to engage
 I 2 them

them unto fruitfulness. The Owner did not only tarry three years, but he was all this while *coming*, i. e. upon all occasions; and he comes to *seek fruit*. Gods coming to sinners under the Gospel, doth not intend a meer observation, but also the endeavours that he useth with them for their good, in the application of means to them in such a way as to invite and encourage them; and this will be evident if we consider, when God may properly be said to come? Gods coming is not to be understood only in respect of his Omnipresence, for that all Beings are equally sharers in, but it intends his application of Himself to them for the perswading of them to Repentance. There is therefore an outward, and an inward coming here to be taken notice of.

1. God comes outwardly to men in his Ordinances, and in his Providences. These are the external means which he makes use of, which are suited to the nature of man, and have a voice of God in them. The Ordinances are primarily so, being appointed of God to discover his mind and meaning to the children of men; in which he reveals to them the way of profiting; declares what is his will and their Duty; shows them their native barrenness, and where their fruit is to be had; calls upon them to attend the things of their peace; warns them of the danger

of neglect, sets before them the gracious encouragements of Obedience, and is continually putting them in mind of the things which they are apt to forget. God indeed useth the Ministry of men in these respects, but they are *Ambassadors* that represent God himself, 2 Cor. 5. 20. to *hearken* to them, is to *hearken* to him; to *despise* them, is to *despise* him. Thus God comes every Sabbath, and Lecture; in every Ordinance that is Dispensed; every Sermon that is Preached, every counsel and warning that is privately given, Jer. 25. 4. 7. Providences are so secondarily, viz. as they are used by God to back his Ordinances, and lay men under the more sensible obligations to hearken and yield Obedience to them: the *Rod* is therefore said to be have a voice in it, Mic. 6. 9. and it is God that speaks by it to the children of men.

2. God comes also inwardly to men; & that is by his secret strivings with their hearts in these Ordinances and Providences. There are the near approaches of God to them, which though others discern not, yet they themselves cannot but be sensible of. The Spirit of God strave with the old World in the Ministry of Noah: They that resist the Gospel are said to resist the Holy Ghost, Act. 7. 51. and that not only because they who preach it are Commissioned by him to their work, but also because he himself comes in and with it.

and moves upon the hearts of men, leaves some touches there, which are for their awakening, and put them under Conviction, and upon consideration : There are oftentimes secret whispers in mens Souls, which say to them, this is your concern, which fasten this and that cord upon them ; which under such Providences as they met with, makes them to reflect and consider, which put them upon purposing and promising, or at least upon thoughtful deliberation with themselves ; and as long as it is so, God is coming inwardly as well as outwardly. It is true, this inward application is not tied to the outward ; sinners therefore are not, by every word or rod, put upon such thoughts ; but it is often so, nor doth this always last as long as the other ; men may have sinned away the spirit from coming in the Ordinances unto their hearts, whilst God yet sees meet to be coming to them in outward dispensations ; but whilst both these are continued to them, this is that which is properly their day of Grace.

PROPOSITION III.

2. That God keeps an exact account of all this patience, and these pains. He hath a Book of memorial, in which he enters upon the record all his layings out upon them. Books of Register are in the Scripture ascribed to God, after the manner of men

men, to intimate to us, that he hath the exact account of such things with him, that he keeps them in remembrance, and forgets none of them. For this reason we have him so often, in his word, giving his people close hints of what he had b'n doing for them at this & that time, and how long he had bin at it, *Jer 23.2.* and else-where. He observes and keeps the account how many Sermons they have heard, what Counsels were given to them here and there, how many Sabbaths, they have had the advantage of, how many of his servants he hath sent to speak to them, what they said; how many applications his Spirit hath made to their souls, how long it is from the first day to this. And if any shall enquire, what makes God so accurate in recording these memorials, There are two reasons for it.

1. God sets an high value upon these favours of his which he thus affords unto men. He looks upon them to be extraordinary kindnesses, That any should be planted in his Vineyard, and there have the priviledge of all the tendance of it: he therefore saith of such, that he hath known them after a singular manner, *Amos 3. 2.* and there is never a day wherein men are spared notwithstanding their unprofitableness, never an approach that he makes to them, but it is of great worth; they are favours which carry

in them singular demonstrations of his good will, and they bring with them the greatest advantages to the children of men, who deserve none of them : God challengeth men, if they can to tell him, *What he could have done more for them* : well then may he keep the records of them.

2. God intends to call sinners that have neglected them, to an account about them. They are indeed free favours, if we consider our merit, and we could never have claimed them, or Gods liberty who had no obligation from us to bestow them upon us : but they are not so free as to be forgotten, or as if we were no way concerned whether we use or abuse them : no, in the day of accounts, which is coming, they are all to be reckoned for. When the Lord made up the reckoning with his *Servants*, he dealt with each of them according to the number of *Talents* which they had received of him. Sabbaths, Sermons, and Sacraments, and Mercies, and afflictions must be answered for. Now that a true Reckoning may be made, an exact account must be kept, men must be made Debtors in Gods Book for all these Items ; they must be charged in order to their being answered for ; and that they may so be, they must be Registered.

112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.

PROPOSITION IV.

That God also keeps the reckoning of all the improvement which men make of their patient endeavours of his. We are therefore told what remark the Owner made on his fig-tree, after his so long coming and seeking fruit : *he found none*, and this is to be made at the foot of every visit that he made ; he came in such an Ordinance at such a time, and lookt that there should be fruit upon it, *and found none* ; and at another time, *and found none* ; and *toties quoties* : Not only that they are barren at last, but how they are so progressively ; how they continue to be so from time to time, and then put the whole series together. Thus we have one piece of Gods account on this matter drawn out, *Amos 4. 6, &c.* and if the reason of this be asked, it will be evident, if we consider,

1. That the account which God calls them unto is in order to recompense. For this cause the day of Judgment is called the day of *Recompense*. The Apostle tells us upon what account it is that *we must all appear.* 2 Cor. 5. 10. When therefore Our Saviour gives us a description of the Great day, *Matth. 25.* he determines it in the distribution of rewards to men ; and this must be made with respect

respect to their bearing, or barrenness. Rewards have always an eye unto something that is done, it is not therefore enough that God observes and remembers what he hath done for men, but he also must have on the other side the account of what they have done: how else shall the accounts be adjusted between them; or by what rule shall he give them their rewards? especially if we consider,

2. That there are two sorts of plants in Gods Vineyard, whose recompenses are different. God therefore must not only observe what he doth for them, but how they carry themselves under it. There is a reward of Grace, and a reward of Vengeance, a recompense of Life, and of Death; there are some that do bear fruit, that do improve the patience and layings out of God faithfully, and for these there is a Gracious remuneration; blessedness is secured to them by promise, and they must receive it: but there are others that neglect the means, and instead of yeilding the good fruits of holiness, do bring forth the vile fruits of sin, and by that means *turn the Grace of God into wantonness*; these are to be rewarded with misery; there are punishments appointed for them. These therefore must be distinguished and known each from the other, which calls for this particular account; and the rather, if we yet farther add,

3. That

3. That mens recompenses are to be proportioned according unto their receipts and improvements. There is not only a distribution of rewards, to be made, according as men are found fruitful or barren; but they are to be measured according to the degrees of either. It is true, the recompenses of fruitfulness are of meer grace, and there is nothing we can do, that will earn any degree of happiness for us; but yet if God please to proportion glory hereafter, according as he measures out grace here, who shall forbid him? if the Lord will say to him that hath *gained ten Talents, rule over ten Cities*, and to him that hath *gained five talents, rule over five Cities*, it is as he sees meet: and if he will thus encourage endeavours in us, it is his Grace. But as to unfruitful ones, it is certain that every offer of grace despised, is a new provocation, every Sabbath neglected is a farther affront offered to the goodness of God, and should he not make these mens sufferings to be accordingly greater, than theirs who had less time, and fewer endeavours used with them, he would be a loser in some of his works, which he must not be. The Declarative Glory of God then calls for it: and because he will have glory answerable to his expenses, he must keep the account: hence we read of his rewarding men according to what

what they have done ; and of the condition of some being far more tolerable than that of others.

U S E I

For Information in two particulars ;

1. That a place in the visible Church is a dangerous station. It is indeed a great privilege ; they that are here are nearer to Salvation than others ; but if they are under such a curious observation, and such an exact account be taken of all their receipts and returns, needs must their hazards be very great. Is all charged upon them, and are their Departments under it set down to their score ? doth God write down every thing ? it will then be a large scrawl that all such will have to be called to an account for : and O that careless sinners would think much of this ; it might serve greatly to put the aw of God upon their hearts.

2. Hence see the great folly and danger of all such as boast of their privileges, and regard not the improvement of them. How many are there who talk high of what they enjoy ? they are placed in Gods House, they are favoured with all the benefits of the Gospel : but in the mean while, they are regardless to themselves, and to their lives ; they

take no heed to themselves how they live under these liberties ; and yet they value themselves according to these things : and what multitudes are there who have found that this kind of computation hath proved their undoing ? these must needs run a fearful risk and will be sadly disappointed, when after they have boasted and bragged of their great enjoyments, they shall be summoned to answer for all, and a fearful scrawl shall be drawn up against them, of their horrible neglect, contempt and unprofitableness under all ? when they shall sadly be convinced, that it had been better for them to have grown in any other Soyl in the world, then to have had a place in the Vineyard ?

And therefore,

U S E II.

Let every such one be exhorted to keep a strict account of these things. If God doth thus, it then loudly calls upon us to do so too ; and to move us hereto, Consider,

1 The neglect of this duty is one great reason of the barrenness of professors. A careless frame of spirit ; a neither regarding the operations of the Lord, nor observing the framings of their own souls ; this makes multitudes to live as if they had neither duty
nor

nor danger before them : and how often have we God complaining of his people that they would not consider, mentioning it as the leading cause of all the other things which he had to Article against them for ? this *not laying of things to heart* made them secure and regardless of themselves.

2. This reckoning, if any thing, will quicken you to present duty. I am sure that it carries matter of awful awakening in it, and helps to convince us how much we are concerned to see that our matters be good ; to think that we have to do with a God, who is so strict in observing and recording, and is consequently like to be so exact in reckoning with us. *Paul* thought it to be an argument of strong persuasion, 2 Cor : 5. 11.

3. This is the way to know your present state. We are all debtors to God for all that he is thus doing for us ; and according to our improvement of these things, is the account stands between him and us ; in this way then we come to a reckoning with God. We know what we are indebted to him, by reflecting upon all that he hath been doing for us ; but we know upon what ground we stand with him, by a right computing what fruit there is of all this in us.

4. Thus also we shall come to know how it is like

like to go with us in the day of Judgment. Then it will be strictly enquired both what we recieved, and how we improved: then the faithful servant shall have his *enue* well done: and then the unprofitable servant shall recieve his Condemnation, and surely it is good for us to know before hand if we may, whether we are like to stand or fall in the Judgment, and for our Direction in this Affair, let us take these Rules.

1. Be frequent and distinct in observing all the ways in which God comes to you. There hath been a summary account of this given in the explication of the Doctrine: and if God distinctly observes them, do you do so too; and that both outwardly and inwardly: and be very particular: remember this Sabbath, that Lecture, this mercy, that affliction, &c: what was spoken in your hearing, and what there was whispered in your hearts: and reckon, not only the seasons that you did enjoy, but what you might have enjoyed if you had not willingly, at least negligently omitted; for God certainly doth so; and you must expect to hear of it again.

2. Examine your selves particularly what use you have made of these things. Set down the improvement over-against the enjoyment: this is the way to have the accounts clear. Say to your own Souls, God
came

came to me at such a time in his Word, and spake thus, what impression did it make on my heart and life: he came in such a mercy, what did I render to him for it? he spake to me by such an affliction, how did I relent it? what is my profiting by all these things? and that your account may be full, enquire after your carriage both in the time, and afterwards: what impression did it leave on your hearts? did you entertain God speaking to you, or did you reject him? and how did it influence your after-conversation: did you soon forget it, or hath it made you to be more careful and critical in your steps?

3. Draw particular Conclusions from hence: and more especially these two.

1. Let the Conviction of barrenness quicken you to repentance, and diligence. How many, if they would draw up the accounts faithfully, will find that they have ill requited God, and never born any fruit? and who is there but may sadly say, I have not come up as I ought, to an answerableness to what God hath been doing for me? and what doth this call for, but that we go to God and bewail it, repent of it, and seek to have the accounts adjusted by Christ our Surety? and to ask of him grace that we may be up and doing, and redeem the time that remains, in better diligence, serving him more and better.

2. Let

1. 2. Let us mightily encourage us to renewed industry in bearing fruit, to think that God keeps such an account. As the consideration of this solemn truth should make us both fearful and careful in our work, because he puts it on record what he hath done for us, so to remember that he also enters down all that we do in our whole life, should make us not only afraid of misimprovement, but also cheerful in a constant vigorous improvement, as knowing that, if it be so, our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.



SERMON VIII

DOCTRINE II.

It is an high Aggravation of the guilt of sinners in the visible Church that they remain barren after long Patience, and great pains used with them.

Here lies the Emphasis of the Complaint, that he had tarried so many years, and
come

come so frequently, and the fig-tree continues barren : and he speaks it as a strange thing, that calls for observation; *Behold!* That the sins of men do admit of aggravations, or are greatned by circumstances, is evident from Scripture. Not only are some sins in themselves more heinous and scandalous than others; but the same sins in themselves, may be made more provoking and deeper died; and there are divers ways in which they come so to bee, and among other rules by which this is to be Judged of, here is one : *Viz: The greater obligations that God hath upon man, to repent of and turn from their sins to him, the greater must the provocation needs be.* This was it that made Solomons sin the more observable, because God had appeared to him twice : this aggravated Davids sin, because God had done so much for him : this made the sin of *Capernaum* so terrible, because *Christ* had done so many wonderful works among them : this put an Emphasis upon the sin of the Woman *Jezebel*, that God had given her a space to repent, and she repented not. Now among these obligations, the most comprehensive are these two contained in our Text, *viz. Gods long patience with them, and his often coming to them;* and here we may enquire,

1. When men may be said to remain barren under all?

2. Who are

2. Whence it is that they so do?

3. Wherein this appears to be so great an aggravation of their Guilt?

1. When men may be said to be barren after all?

A. It hath been already expressed under a former Doctrine, what are the Characters of a fruitless tree in the Vineyard. All I shall here add is only to observe, that there is a two-fold barrenness that may be taken notice of in professors that sit under the means of Grace, and have long enjoyed Gods patient Dealings with them, Viz; total and partial.

1. Total barrenness is when men, after all, remain in their natural state, unconverted to God. Every Child of Adam, in his unconverted state, is barren: he is utterly incapable of bringing forth any fruit that is acceptable to God; he is a briar and thorn, and cannot bear figs. The sinner, before conversion, hath no saving principle in him, and therefore he cannot serve God; his best moral actions are but glittering abominations: as long therefore as he abides thus; and doth not truly turn to God, he is the same man that he was born: whatsoever men obtain by means, though they get a great deal of literal knowledge in the things of God, and obtain so much of a civil and moral conversation, as the young man in, *Mat. 19.* yet if

he be not savingly changed, if he be not thoroughly turned to God, he is an empty vine, his works are dead works, he is still dead in trespasses and sins. Nature under all its moral refinings, is but nature still; grace is another manner of thing, and he is a stranger to it; he is yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.

2. Partial barrenness is when Professors do not bring forth fruit answerable to their tilling. When Christians have a new principle of grace in them, and do bear real fruit, but it is little they bring forth, nothing in comparison with the cost and Pains that is laid out upon them: and good scarce deserves to be called so, in them from whom far better is expected. God doth not afford to all his people alike advantages; and a tree may be counted fruitful for one Soil that may be reputed unfruitful in another: and it is apparent, that some Christians that enjoy the same helps, that grow in the same Vineyard, do abundantly less for God than others do; now these may be said in a degree to be barren: and although the Doctrine more especially aims at the former, yet these also come under the consideration of it.

2. Whence it is that they are so? i. e. that they abide unfruitful after all endeavours patiently used with them.

A. There are these things here to be observed:

7. In respect of total barrenness?

1. That man's natural barrenness cleaves to him so close, that no creature can remove it. They cannot bear, except they be changed, and there is no power in themselves, nor in any man or Angel to do it for them. It is a work of Divine Power to make any soul spiritually fruitful: the stock, and root and branches are dead; and as a dead tree cannot bear, so art cannot put life into it, a Miracle only can, *Joh. 1. 13.*

2. That hence the means, though proper as means, yet have their efficacy absolutely depending on him who hath made them means. Every man cannot wield *Goliath's Sword*. The word indeed is compared to a *two-edged Sword*, but none can make it to cut by the Spirit: An Instrument is then serviceable, when one that is able and skillful applies it; the Word then converts, when the Spirit makes it a converting word. If God touch *Lydia's heart*, whilst *Paul* is Preaching, she shall yield to the call; if he puts quickning efficacy into it, men shall be quickened by it, else they remain *dead in trespasses and sins*, for all the endeavours of moral Instruments.

3. There is a natural resistance in the hearts of men, to all the endeavours which are used with them in the means. The congenerate corruption which men bring with them

them into the world, hath in it a strong enmity against all which is good, Rom. 8. 7, 8, and by vertue of this they set themselves to resist the Spirit of God, and so withstand all the calls and counsels that are given them, despising the goodness and forbearance of God, and turning the Gospel grace into wantonness; and thus will all men do as long as they are left to themselves, by reason of the wickedness that is in their hearts.

4. That God doth often judicially leave men to their own choice. *He gives them up to their heares lusts*, they resist his grace, and he calls, and convinceth, and waits, but they will not hear him, and thereupon he suffers them to take their course, because they will not receive instruction: and it is righteous with him so to do, because they in this resistance, shut their eyes against rational conviction, and are wilful against the clearest light; and whilst it is so, let him wait never so long, and come never so often, they will be never the better, but abide barren still.

2. In respect of partial barrenness.

1. There is a root of corruption, tending to unfruitfulness, in Gods children in this life. *Paul hath his body of death* which pesters him; and what is the tendency of Death but barrenness? *a dead womb is a barren womb; a dead heart, a barren heart.* The acts of grace are life acts, death therefore is direct-

ly contrary to them, and this was the thing which made Paul so unable to do the things that he would.

2. There are a great many Temptations that the Children of God do meet with to hinder them in their constant serving of God. The World we live in, is a place of Temptation, and every thing is full of it; and the tendency of it is to allure or discourage the Christian from his work. There are the Temptations of carnal pleasures, of worldly encumbrances, of difficulties and threatening dangers in Duty. Riches have their snares, and so hath poverty: peace hath its allurements, and persecution its affrightments.

3. The corrupt part that is in us, often takes advantage by these Temptations to obstruct the Christian in his business. It is by these things that the Law in his Members brings him into Captivity; and if the Spirit of God leaves him to himself to try what is in him, it is always so: he either dallies with allurements, and diverts unhappily to these things, and spends his time with them; or he stops at discouragements, and sits still disheartned; and by these means he neglects the work of God, which causeth the fruits of Holiness to grow very thin upon him, as the grapes on the vines after the Vintage, Micah.

3. Wherein this appears to be so great an aggravation of their Guilt?

A. This will be seen by laying those things together.

1. That it is the duty of sinners to hearken to the voice of God. Whatever plea men may pretendedly make of their own impotency, it gives them no discharge from the obligation of Duty which is lying upon them. God is the rightful Lord and Law-giver; and his commands have an Obedience due to them from the creature, who cannot withhold it without the guilt of rebellion. Besides, the Gospel takes off all excuse here; because it looks upon men as being without strength in themselves, and hath accordingly provided and offered all help to them in *Christ*, whose spirit is ready and able to do all that is wanting. Now it is certain that God requires fruit of all that enjoy the means: he looks for it, *Text.* It is his will that they bear it, *1 Thes. 4. 3.*

2. That this Patience of God gives men a great deal of opportunity to bring forth fruit, if they had an heart to it. This life is a time of serving God in; that which follows is the time of reward: the longer therefore men live in Gods Vineyard, the greater season they have of doing him service: every day that they are there continued, puts a new price into their hands, which, when once Gods patience is at an end,
men

men must never more expect to enjoy: and hence the more of it is now allowed them; which they improve not, the more opportunity is lost: it gives them space to bethink themselves, to reflect upon their ways and courses, to recover their lost time, and to redeem their season, by a better and more diligent improvement of it.

3. The means afforded them are very proper as means, to the end of fruitfulness. Means indeed are to be looked at in their proper place, and acknowledged as so; and in this respect there is nothing wanting to them, which is proper and suitable in this affair. Our fruit is a *reasonable service*, Ro. 12. 1. the means which God comes to us in, are very well accommodated to such a service, for its help, 2 Tim. 4. 16, 17. They serve to inform the understanding in the Doctrines of Salvation, and tell men wherein God is to be served; what is the fruit that he expects and will accept; where strength is to be had, and how to be improved; to establish the Judgment in the excellency of Obedience, and great benefits of serving God; to convince the Conscience of all sin and disobedience; to terrify sinners from their sinful unprofitableness; to encourage holiness, by all the precious promises which are made to all such as bear fruit: and what more can be desired in means.

4. Hence

4. Hence this patience, and these pains which God useth are leading to Repentance. If the *Goodness and Forbearance* of God exercised towards heathen are so, *Rom*, 2. 3. How much more are these Gospel endeavours so, which he lays out upon men that are under the dispensations of it? They lead by way of Conviction shewing men what reason there is why they should so do; and they lead also by way of Invitation: there is an Invitation in the things themselves, patience saith that God is not willing these sinners should perish; else he needed not to have waited on them, who every day gave him provocation; and that hath a loud call in it. Every time God comes in an Ordinance or Providence, he doth therein bespeak men: and to be sure all the secret approaches of the spirit of God to their hearts in and by these, have a close call in them.

5. Hence the more men have of these, and continue unfruitful under them, the more is God despised, and his favours abused. Barrenness under Gods patience & pleading with men, addes contempt to unprofitableness, and by this means all the expense that is laid out upon them comes to be lost, as to their benefit, & they do what in them lies to frustrate God of his just expectation. For a tree in the *Wilderness* to bear nothing is not so much, but when it is transplanted into the *Vineyard*

Vineyard; and hath stood there from year to year, under all the care and tendance which is there used, still to bear nothing; it hath so much labour and time spent upon it in vain. Sinners have now the Guilt of neglecting so many endeavours, spending so many dayes to no purpose, trampling upon so many calls and counsels; and if God sets a great value on these things, their Guilt must needs be greatly heightened, who slight and contemn them all.

6. Hereby unregenerate sinners the more discover their impenitency, & desperate hardness of heart: yea indeed, they are made the more obstinate and hard-hearted. Unprofitableness under the means that God useth with men in his house, makes them more rooted in sin, and they that are not converted by them, are set farther off from it, and that not only judicially, but naturally too; for sin gets head and ripens no where faster, then under the Gospel, which, where it is not a *savour of life*, will be a *savour of death*; i. e. it will leave men more dead, more unbelieving; set them farther off from God, and under a greater Moral Difficultie of Conversion; and this also is an aggravation.

7. Hereby Believers discover the strength of their *natural corruption*, and do also carry it *unworthy of their vocation*. *It is unbecoming*
for

for Gods children to fall into any unprofitable frame, because they are new-born that they might live to the glory of God; and that honour which God hath by them, is by their bearing: but for them to live and continue unfruitful notwithstanding all the means, which are so advantageous to stir up and nourish their graces, to rowze and encourage them: must needs be exceeding unworthy, and consequently very offensive to God, as being contradictory to their profession, and a losing of the greatest part of the benefit which they enjoy: it therefore evidenceth that they give way to the body of death, and indulge that lust which they ought to be always mortifying, else it would not be so, and this must needs bring guilt upon them.

U S E I.

This shews us the way how men come to be the amazing monuments of Gods wrath. When God hath a purpose to suffer sinners to bring upon themselves, the most astonishing impressions of his indignation, and to fill up such a measure as shall make them peculiar instances of his revenging justice: he placeth them in the Church, gives them leave to sit under clearest Gospel light, and to enjoy all the advantages of the means to the highest, to have line upon line, and to suffer them

them to stand a long while in this state, until they have despised a world of endeavours used with them, and tired out a long continued patience, before he falls upon them, and cuts them off; that by abusing the best of mercies, and wearing out the most restrained forbearance, they may fall at last under the load of so great guilt, as will drag them down into the depths of destruction: and by this means, though for the present he seems to be a loser by these men, yet he doth fully recover his injured glory at their hands in the winding up: Hence,

U S E II.

Let it be for an awakening word of terror to all unfruitful Professors, who have been a long while under Gospel dispensations. One would think it should fill the hearts of sinners with consternation to consider of this Truth; that all the while they live under the enjoyment of these favours of God, they are encreasing their account and enflaming the reckoning. Doth every neglected opportunity add one article against you, and encrease the score of your guilt, think then how much there is heaped up against you, and ask your own souls how you shall endure, when all this shall come to be charged upon you: but
give

Give me leave to turn this terror into a word of advice; therefore.

U S E III.

Let it be a loud call to old sinners that are under the Gospel. Are there none among us, that have not been three, but thirty, forty, fifty years in the Vineyard, under the means of grace, and strivings of the Spirit of God, and have not to this day brought forth any fruit that God will, accept of, but have lived in their natural state, neglected their Souls, and not regarded to improve the Opportunities they have had? Let this Doctrine awaken you, and put you upon making haste to get your sin pardoned, your guilt removed, and your souls made fertile; and to move you thereto, let me offer these considerations.

1. Think how much Guilt you have already contracted to yourselves. Know it, whatever pretence of respect you have shewn to the Gospel and the means of Grace, yet your barrenness is a witness against you that you have indeed neglected and despised all: count up how many Sabbaths you have lived. and remember so many days have been profaned by you; and so many Sermons as you have heard, so many witnesses you have

have laid against you : so many of Gods Messengers as have laboured in vain amongst you. so many accusers you will have another day, if you repent not : If, once rejecting Christs call, if once refusing to comply with the striving spirit, be enough to ruine you forever ; how will you be able to stand up under the weight of such innumerable provocations ? and will you go on still ? say, is it not high time for you now at length to look about you and bestir yourselves.

2. Remember what an Holy God you have to do with. Never delude your selves with a vain confidence in abused mercy. God knows how to cloth himself with Vengeance, and kindle up his fury into a fire unquenchable, if you dare to go on to irritate it, by your impenitence. His Holiness stands engaged for his Honour and will not give away his Glory. His Holiness will not suffer him to lose all the cost and patience laid out upon you. Though *fury be not in him yet*, he will *burn up briars and thorns*, that resolve to continue to be such : though he can bear with, yet he will not acquit the Guilty, if they continue to be so : they are at present a burden to him, and he is pressed by them but he will ease himself of these his Enemies.

3. You have as yet the invitation and opportunity to be fruitful. You are still in the Vine-

Vineyard: wonder at it, and take the encouragement of it, and let it awaken you to improve it. God is still patient, and let that lead you to repentance: there is hope concerning you, but still there is great danger, as you may afterwards hear: let your danger excite you, and your hopes draw you to lay aside any longer delays, and put your selves upon present expedition; go to Christ for pardon, and wait upon him for grace, ask of him his spirit, beg hard that he will purge you, that you may yet be fruit-bearing trees in his Vineyard: and though it be at the ninth or eleventh hour, yet if you be serious and faithful, it shall be well.

U S E IV.

Let this also serve to quicken decaying Christians, who yet have the root of the matter in them. Are there any such among us, that have fallen from their first love, and are grown into a great measure of barrenness, who have sometimes flourished in the Courts of God? be awakened and rowzed up to remember the first works and do them, and to excite you hereunto; consider,

1. You greatly dishonour God, and grieve his holy spirit by this. All the fruit that is born unto God in this world is produced by

By true believers ; if then you come short too, what shall he do to his Vineyard ? this is a very ill requital of God, for all that he hath done for you more then others : to others he hath given the means of Grace, and it is their great iniquity that they despise them, but he hath given you grace with the means, and that is unspeakably more ; he may therefore well expostulate with you in a solemn manner.

2. You are also yourselves great losers by it. The more fruit that you bear, the more Glory you shall have. Will it not be a great loss, though you be saved by fire ; yet to have a great many of your works burnt up ? you will also dye with the less comfort : the reflection of your minds upon so much unprofitableness, under such glorious advantages as you have had, will be a sad thought in a dying hour, when you are going to give up your accounts : Hence.

1. Be much in mortifying the lusts that are in you. It is from the prevalency of them that your fruitfulness is obstructed : if they be subdued and kept under, Grace will thrive and put forth ; but as long as they are indulged that will be at an under : go then to the *Father*, the great *Husbandman*, and pray to him that he will purge you, that so you may bear fruit.

2. Stir up the Graces that are within you.

God hath given you a saving principle, but it must be exercised; it will not bring forth fruit without your careful and diligent improvement of it: and call upon the Spirit of Grace to help you: This will be a good way for you to recover your lost time, and by *double diligence* to be the more fruitful, from the Consideration of your former decays.



SERMON IX

WE have considered the Owners complaint, that which follows is,

2. The advice which he gives to the *Vinedresser* about this tree; in which there are two things observable;

1. The word of command given out for its excision; *Cut it down*. The word, in its usage is almost appropriate to Husbandmen or Gardners; and it signifieth more than a meer cutting down, *viz.* an *Exirpation*. When
trees

trees are dead or barren, they used to cut them up by the roots; and make fuel of them for the fire, that so room might be made for the planting of others in their place : and it here Allegorically designs the utter ruine and destruction of the barren professor. Only here a difficulty ariseth which must be obviated, *viz.* How comes the Vine-dresser to be commanded to do it? especially upon the former interpretation given, which told us that he represented the Gospel Ministry; the Ministers work being to aim at the conversion and salvation, and not the destruction of those whom he is sent unto : for which reason some interpret God himself, others, Christ to be here intended, who *hath the Keys of Heaven and Hell*, the power of life and death. It might be sufficient here to answer, that similitudes do not run on all four, and therefore Parables are not to be over-strained : and it might suffice to say, it intends that God will not always bear with unprofitable unregenerate sinners, that live under the Gospel, and that he gives his Servants notice of it. Men are wont to cut up trees in their Gardens by the hands of their Servants, who look after them ; God will do this to these with his own hand, only he would have his Ministers to give them faithful notice of it. But I suppose, there is something more in it then so : Let us then here observe, that there is a twofold cutting

cutting off of sinners according to Scripture; the one is *Ministerial*, the other *Providential*.

This latter is Gods prerogative, and he doth it by those judgments which he brings upon them, in which also he often uses the Instrumentality of second causes. Sometimes he doth it by war, sometimes by pestilential diseases, sometimes by the hand of civil justice to which he suffers them to expose themselves; and he hath many ways to accomplish it by; but in this the Gospel Ministry is not concerned. The former of these belongs properly to them, as they are the Ambassadors of God, sent to treat with men about the affairs of the Kingdom, who, if men will not accept of the terms of the treaty, and comply with the Articles offered them, are, after all means used to bring them to it unsuccessfully, to proclaim war against them. They are first to call and counsel, and plead with sinners, and if that will not do, then are they to warn them, and if they accept not of that, their business then is to threaten them, and tell them what they are to expect; and this the Spirit of God, calls *killing of them*, *Hof. 6. 5.* and in this sense must *Jeremiab's Commission* be interpreted, *Jer. 1. 10.*

2. The equity and prudence of this Command is vindicated; and that is proposed

interrogatorily, to shew the unanswerableness of it, *why cumberst thou the ground?* The word translated, *cumber*, signifies to make a thing useless and unserviceable; not only to burden a thing, but to damnify it too: and we may look upon that to be a cumber, which is an unprofitable burden. It serves here to intimate to us what great hurt unfruitful professors do in the Visible Church, which calls for their being cut down. there are three Observations may be gathered from these words.

DOCTRINE. I.

That God will not always bear with fruitless professors in his Visible Church.

This Doctrine ariseth from the connexion of the edict here given out, with the complaint made in the former part of the verse. It is q.d. *I have been thus long waiting to no purpose, and I can bear no longer.* We have already taken notice, that God useth much patience with many sinners, and that this patience of his is arbitrary, but we now come to observe, that though he bear a great while, yet he will not so do for

for ever ; that he may be *weary with forbear-
ing*, that sinners may by their continuing im-
penitent tire him out, and incense his indig-
nation against them ; that if they have a day
of grace given them to repent in, and they
repent not, it will come to an end : Here we
may enquire into,

1. The evidence of the Doctrine, that it
is so,

2. The ground of it, or the reason why
it is so.

1. For the evidence of the Doctrine, or
that it is so: and here we need to look no
farther than the Scripture warnings, threat-
nings, and examples which do abundantly il-
lustrate it. For Warnings and Threatnings
how many might be produced ? let a few suf-
fice. What did God say to and of the old
World in *Noah's* time ? Gen. 6. 3. *My spirit
shall not always strive*. He saith indeed that it
shall be long, but assures them it shall have an
end : and how did God urge his advice upon
the Jews by his Prophets, but by such a con-
sideration ? see *Isa. 55. 6. seek the Lord while
he may be found* ; intimating that he would
not else be ever so, and *Jer. 4. 4. Circumcise,
&c. lest my fury, &c.* When God saith *lest*,
it intimates that there is such a thing, for he
doth not fright them with bug-bears ; and a
like expression we have, *Jer. 6. 8. Be instruct-
ed, &c.* thus also he presseth the Church of
Ephesus,

Ephesus, *Rev.* 2. 5. As for Scripture Examples, giving us to understand that it hath been so; that God hath been weary with forbearing, and caused his anger to break in upon such as have been his visible people, and enjoyed Vineyard-priviledges; they are *for our admonition*, and tell us that what God hath done, he may do again, yea and will too upon the like provocation given him: And here; if we speak of a people in general, *Israel* of old stand for monuments of this to the end of the world: how near God had taken them to him we find upon record; they were the only people that he had in the World; they were his vineyard which he had planted, and fenced, &c. *Isa.* 52. begin. and God sends *Jerusalem* to *Shiloh*, *Jer.* 7. 11. to see what he had done there; and see what the Psalmist saith of that, *Psal.* 78. 58, &c. and he sends us to *Jerusalem*, which met with as fearful a desertion, as we have it pathetically represented by the Prophet in his Lamentations. If of particular persons, see what is said to *Jezebel* and her paramours *Rev.* 2. 21. &c. and doubtless it was verified. Yea how often did God witness against these and those for their rebellion against him? But

2. For the ground of it, or the reason why it is so, we may gather it up in these conclusions.

1. That

1. That though Gods Patience be himself, and therefore Infinite, yet it is exercised according to his Wisdom and pleasure. Attributes considered as in God, are God, for he is one individed Essence, and pure act, and therefore every vertue which we ascribe to God, must be acknowledged to be Infinite in him: but yet as they are made to shine out in his works of Efficiency, we are to account them voluntary, and managed according to the Wisdom of God: he therefore measures them out to the Creature more or less, according to his own discretion. For men therefore to argue from the Divine Nature of Gods love, mercy, forbearance, &c. to please themselves with an opinion that he must be boundless in his expressions of them to the creature, is a vain fancy, and that which God warns men against, lest they should so cheat themselves into ruine, *Isa. 27. 4.*

2. That God must and will be glorified in all those Attributes of his which he displays to the children of men. God doth all things for himself; his own glory is his own last end in all his works of Efficiency, and therefore he manageth the whole discovery of them, with an eye fixed on this end: he had been glorious in himself, if he had never manifested any of his Perfections to the creature; but if he do thus make himself known, he will bring about his declaratory glory by

It is that which is dear to him, and he will not part with it. If therefore he be patient with sinners, and wait upon them when he might destroy them; if he defer his revenge, and suppress his anger, he will have the honour of this, he will get to himself a name by it.

2. That for which God waits upon sinners under the Gospel is to see if they will bear fruits. That which is the end of a tree's planting, is that which a man expects of it, and for that it is he lets it grow, and waits from year to year to see if it answers the end, Text. Men are planted in Gods Vineyard on purpose for fruit; there are none standing there of whom it is not expected. Now the Husbandman knows that time must be allowed to trees planted, for their fructifying; and he is wont to think, that though such a tree doth not this year answer his expectation, but goes over, and bears nothing; yet it is possible it may make amends for it the next year, and if then it also misseth, yet if it doth but blossom, and bid fair for it, though all fall off and dy away, he is willing to try one season more, as being loth to cut it down if it may be prevented: but still all his patience is, because he supposeth it may at last bear: Thus God expresseth his waiting upon sinners to be upon such a presumption, Zeph. 3. 7.

4. That all the while that any remain unfruitful in Gods Vineyard, they cast contempt on

Gods Patience. For this reason impenitent Sinners are said to *despise it*, Rom. 2. 3. God looks upon himself to be scorned, and his lenity to be trampled on by such persons; for hereby they do withstand and directly set themselves against the very design of the Gospel, they do, as to the present efficacy, make void all the pains and endeavours that are laid out upon them; they turn the grace of God into wantonness: God waits for their repentance, and they answer it with obstinacy, and impenitence, which is directly contrary: and when is mercy despised, but when it is abused? and what greater abuse can be offered to it than this?

5. Hence God is hereby greatly dishonoured, and therefore must needs be very highly provoked. For Sinners to offer an affront to any of Gods Attributes, is a reflection of dishonour upon him. Men count themselves disparaged when they lose their labour; and Gods Honour is trodden upon by Sinners when they abide unprofitable in his vineyard. If then he be bound for his glory in all, and be jealous for his great Name, it must be an high provocation that is thus offered to him; and we must not think that he cannot resent it; no, he declares that his holy Spirit is grieved by such things, *Psal. 78. 40.* and they vex him, *Isa. 63. 10.* and therefore God himself is brought in making that complaint,

Amos 2. 13. *I am pressed under you as a Cart that is pressed with sheaves.* God speaks as a man, who though he bears, and is patient, as to any discovery of himself, yet is inwardly weary, and finds a burden which he would willingly be eased of: intimating that he is displeased at such things; and he is wont to express this displeasure of his, partly in the solemn warnings of his Ordinances, partly in the rebukes of his Providence, which he lays upon such, in sore and heavy affliction; to signify, that though for the present he bears with them, yet he is dissatisfied at them.

6. That impenitent sinners grow worse and worse under the Patience of God, and so add to the provocation. The means of grace under which men are continued during the long-suffering of God, are either a *favour of life*, or of *death*. Now impenitency or unprofitableness makes them to be a *favour of death*, and that is by hardening them in sin; and therefore we find that *evil men* are said to *grow worse*, and this is a natural effect in such; for their hearts being naught, they misimprove all the means to nourish their corruption, and so grow more obstinate, which operation being directly contrary to what the Gospel calls for, which is that they should grow better by it, must needs lay in the more anger of God against them, and therefore the longer they thus abide,

bide, the more must his jealousie be enflamed against them.

7. Men at length grow hopeless, and then Patience is bootless. For if the proper end of Gods patience be to wait for fruit of them, to see if it will not at last repent them of their barrenness; if they will not think *of their ways, and turn their feet unto Gods Commandments*; then the design of it is at an end, when all expectation of this is over: as long as the Owner supposeth that his tree may in time become serviceable, there is some reason for his letting it stand in the Vineyard, but when all grounds of so looking for it fail, and he utterly despairs of any such thing, what should he let it stand for any longer? That there is such a state which sinners do in time arrive at, we are told, *2 Chron. 36. 16.* not that any are gone so far as to out-do Almighty power, but so as to despise all manner of means, and grow obstinate and remorseless, so as that all endeavours do appear to be utterly in vain, when they show their determinate resolution and wilfulness, *Psal. 81. 11, 12. Isa. 1. 5.*

8. Hence God is now put upon it to recover his own glory of them, by bearing no longer. He hath now, to speak after the manner of men, forbore as long as he can: he hath waited to have glory from them by their serving of him, and given them a gra-
cious

ciuous opportunity for it, but there is none comes, nor like to come, but on the contrary he is more dishonoured every day: and now he must look after his honour, and recover it himself. His glory he must have by them; he would have had them given it to him willingly, but they would not, he therefore must have it forcibly: and now his worn out Patience turns into the greatest fury against them; hence that threatening, *Prov. 1. 24.* As a Creditor that betrusts his Debtor from time to time, and is frequently asking his honest payment, but none comes; he still credits them, but hath nothing but words and promises, no performances; at length he sees it bootless to wait any longer, and now he sues him for it, and recovers it in a way of Justice; and there is all reason for it, unless he would lose all; but this God will never do, and why indeed should he?

U S E I.

I

Hence learn how vain a thing it is for any to think that the visible Church is a place of security for such as bear no fruit. I am not here going about to undervalue the visible Covenant, or cast contempt on the Gospel Vineyard: it is a great privilege, and consequently an high favour of God for any to have

have a room there; but this priviledge may be abused, and that may prove mens bane. If men think the Sanctuary to be a shelter for wickedness, a place where they may safely sin, and be out of the reach of danger, they wofully cheat themselves. It is to be feared that there are too many of the children of the Covenant, that think all is well with them, because they have a place among the people of God; there must therefore no evil come unto them; and because God bestows all visible priviledges upon them, therefore they are so in his favour as they never shall be in hazard of knowing his displeasure: God waits and bears, and they think it must always be so: but the Lord assures us that this is *to trust in lying words*; thus to presume is for them to *make a Covenant with Hell, and be in league with death*. Know it, Divine vengeance can fetch a criminal from the city of Refuge, slay a *Joab* at the Altar, find out a barren figtree in the midst of the Vineyard, Because God hath been patient a great while, it follows not that he must be so still; nay it is to be expected that he will not be so much longer, a day of grace will wear out, and indeed in this place is the greatest danger; and therefore;

O S E II.

Let it serve to awaken carnal and fruitless Professors out of this security, you that have been many years in the vineyard, and barren still, be roused up by this consideration; God hath born with you a great while; but seriously consider that, the day of Patience hath its limits, and will come to an end. And that I may urge this Truth upon you in its solemnity, give me leave to lay some awful considerations before you.

1. Consider that you have to do with a God who will not be mocked. It is true, he is a gracious, and merciful, and long-suffering God, but beware of misimproving these Discoveries; know it therefore that he is an Holy God too, & *jealous for his great Name*; he shews his rich mercy to you in that he gives you the privileges of his house, and lays out so much upon you in it; in that he bestows on you the Gospel favours, and *wants that he may be gracious to you*; but he is not to be trampled upon, his goodness is not to be despised; *he will be glorified in them that draw near unto him*; be not therefore deceived, think not that he will be trifled withal by sinners; he is a terrible God *in his Church*, and *all they there that will dare*

dare him to it, by their living in sin, shall find him to be so to their cost.

2. Consider the Covenant under which you stand. hath its threatnings as well as its promises. There are indeed great and precious promises held out to all those that are in the Covenant; but they are also under severe menace, and by vertue of their station in the visible Church, they are equally related to the one as to the other. Do not forget that the Gospel Covenant hath its conditions, and accordingly as men are under them, so it speaks to them comfort or terrour. It saith, if you believe you shall be saved, but it saith too, if you believe not, you shall be damned; it saith, if you bear fruit you shall be commended, but it also assures you, that if you bear none you shall be condemned: yea, as it hath better promises, so it hath more severe threatnings than the first Covenant had. Think it not to be enough to say, I am in the Covenant, and so to run away with a carnal confidence, that all is well: but put your selves upon a thorough search, and enquire what part of the Covenant you stand under; there is a vast difference between being under the Covenant-promise, and threatening; nothing is more comfortable than the former, nothing more amazing than the latter: and know it, that if you abide barren still, this is your condition, and you may well expect to have the threatening accomplished upon you.

3. The day of Gods patience may be near

For an end that you are aware of. This deserves to be well thought of; and, to give some weight to this argument, be advised to consider.

1. In generall, that God frequently falls upon such sinners, when they least expect it. Not but that they have reason and sufficient grounds for this expectation, if they would entertain them; for indeed their very barrenness is enough to excite it in them; but when they, through carnal confidence and vain security, indulge themselves in the expectation of many more days of tranquility, shut their eyes against convictions, and so live without fear of evil; then God breaks in upon them, and makes them to feel the impressions of his indignation; when they say, *To morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant*, when they despise warnings, and trample upon threatenings, and say, *the Vision is for many days to come*. Thus our Saviour declares that it shall be done to the *unfaithful Steward*; *Mat. 24. 50 51*: this *Paul* tells us shall be the lot of such as neglect a day of grace, *1 Thes. 5. 3*.

2. More particularly take these two Rules.

1. That you may be under all the means of Grace, and strivings of the Spirit: and yet Gods patience be near worn out. The Husbandman, as long as the fig-tree is in the Vineyard, and he is waiting for fruit of it;

N

neglects

neglects not the husbandry of it, but gives it the tendance that is proper and he is wont to do so, till he resolves with himself that there will no good come of it, and so to remove it away. Thus God doth by men in the visible Church; let them be never so sinful and vain, yet they shall have the Ordinances, and possibly many convictions of the Spirit, awakenings and terrors, which are a witness that Gods day of Patience is not at an end with them; but it doth not say but that they may speedily be cut off: *the man without the Wedding Garment* is taken from the Table: this therefore is no plea sufficient to build your confidence upon.

2. That God frequently withdraws his Spirit from the means, as the first effect of his departure from unfruitful sinners. He possibly neither takes the means from them, nor them from the means for the present; but he secretly withdraws from them, and leaves them only under outward dispensations, without any inward impressions upon their hearts; he *makes their hearts fat*, and leaveth senselessness and remotion upon them: the Spirit of God departs from them, and then the means ripen them the faster, and make them the more stupid and sottish: and the going away of the Spirit is an awful desertion, and, though not regarded by

By sinners, yet greatly discovers the wrath of God against them *Hos. 9, 12.*

4. Be perswaded to think whether Gods jealousy be not kindled against this people? Are there not many awful tokens of his Anger, and such as speak so much to us, that he is almost weary with forbearing? Look where we will, and observe the frame of things, the state of affairs at home, abroad, in publick, in private concerns, and they all witness that God hath a controversy with us, and that it is begun: and how many are taken by it? and now let us ask, why is all this? *what means the heat of this anger?* is it not for the barrenness of Gods people? is it not because he hath been coming to sick fruit, and finds it not? I am sure every unprofitable soul hath reason to think of it, and that with trembling too; and to say, will not this Judgment find me out? and suppose it should sieze me in particular, will it not be a righteous Judgment upon me? when God is bringing of his Judgments upon his visible people, they that forget God, had need to consider with themselves.

5. Think how woful your condition will be, when God hath done waiting, and you prove unfruitful: Gods day of patience, is your day of grace; when that ends, this ends; and when that is done it will be an evil case that you will be found in. When

(164)

God saith, *I am weary with forbearing, let Sinners in Zion be afraid, and look to themselves: it is for your sakes that he is angry, and therefore you will stand just in the way of his indignation: and how terrible a thing it will be, to be made the monuments of it, when with the day of forbearance, all hopes will cease, and the wrath of God will make a way for it self to fall upon you, will be evident by the next Doctrine, let Sinners then entertain the consideration of this truth with fear and trembling.*

Sermon

S E R M O N X

DOCTRINE II.

A Fearful Destruction waits upon such as have wearied out Gods patience by their barrenness.

Here is the sentence which the Owner pronounceth on the fig-tree, upon his complaint; *Cut it down: stub it up, root it out, let it no longer have any room in the vineyard, but make it fit for the fire.* Their danger then is very great, they stand on the very brink of ruine. That Gods patience may be tired out, and is so by multitudes under the Gospel, hath been already observed; and now we see what becomes of such as these they are to be cut down: God saith it, and he doth not speak words but things. That this Doctrine may be made manifest, we may consider.

1. What is contained or implied in this cutting down?

2. Why it must come to this when Gods patience is wearied?

3. Wherein

3. Wherein the dreadfulnes of this destruction may be discovered ?

1. What is contained or implied in this cutting down.

A. The Metaphor here used, satably represents those judgments of God which fall upon unprofitable ones, in the progress of them ; we may therefore take up the allusion in several particulars.

1. Cutting down a fig-tree in the vineyard argues the Owners great displeasure at it. It saith that he can bear it no longer there : as long as he afforded it dressing, it shewed that he had a favour for it ; but this action proves that now he hath none. Cutting down a timber tree may be with approbation, to put it into the building which he judgeth it meet for ; but cutting down a fruit-tree is from disapprobation, because he sees it unworthy of his care. Hereby therefore is expressed that God is exceeding angry at men ; that his pity and compassion is ended, and his wrath is kindled. God hath no passions in him, properly essential to him, but we ascribe them to him with respect to his Providence. The Scripture therefore signifies such things to be the fruits of his indignation, *Jer. 4. 4. Lev. 26. 28. Job. 20. 28.* Godly men are taken away by death, but it is to make pillars of them in the Celestial Temple ; to transplant them into the Heavens.

venly Paradise ; but these are cut down to shew that God hates them. And

2. Cutting down is Properly for destruction. This is the true import of the word here : it is not a promise, but a threatening, when a tree is cut down and rooted up, it is by that very act destroyed ; it kills it, it presently dies upon it. it withers up, the sap & leaves are presently gone, there is henceforth no more possibility that it should bear any fruit ; it puts an end to all hopes of any such thing. Christ therefore intends that God will destroy the sinner ; he before seemed to have some sap in him, and bear the leaves of a fair profession, it may be ; but now as the *Fig-tree Cursed* by Christ, *he withers up to the very root*. The Apostle speaks of some in the Visible Church, *whose end is destruction*, Phil, 3. 19. A Tree may be moved for its better growing, but it is cut down to put it beyond hopes of any such thing.

3. When the Owner cuts down the tree, he now puts an end to all his husbandry about the Tillage of it. Tillage and extirpation are contraries. he may prune it, and cut off many exuberant branches from it, for its advantage, that it may bring forth more fruit and grow the better ; but if he cuts it down, this is no part of Husbandry to the tree, but a putting of an end to it. It therefore signifies, that God will no more do any thing for

for such a person : he shall have no more offers of Grace, no more strivings of his Spirit, no more dews of Ordinances ; he puts an end to all warnings, counsels, perswasions, entreaties : *He saith to the Clouds that they rain no more upon him, Isa. 5. 6.* it puts a full period to his day of grace, withdraws from him all the means of good. There is a vast difference between afflicting his professing people, and cutting them down ; a man may be afflicted for his good, but if he be cut down, it is for his hurt.

4. There is an instrument used by the Husbandman, for the cutting down of the tree withal. This is fitted and prepared for the purpose. Men use an ax in this service, and they are wont to sharpen it that it may do it effectually. Thus we read, *Matth. 3. 9 The ax is laid to the root of the tree.* This is the ax of Divine Vengeance, and God is usually pleased to do this by the instrumentality of second causes, fitted by him for the purpose : these are for this reason called his Instruments in scripture ; his *Ax*, his *Saw*, his *Sword* : He sometimes indeed makes them only rods, and then indeed it is for amendment ; but at other times they are Swords, Instruments of Excision, *Ezek. 21. 9, 10, 11.* sometimes God finds a Sickness, and that is Commissioned to take away his life, and it doth it, and no means can save him

him alive; it chops him down, and there is an end of him here; sometimes he delivers him up into the hands of an Enemy, and he slays him without pity; these do it but instrumentally; they are Gods Tools, and it is he who makes use of them for this purpose.

5. There are usually divers strokes given for the cutting a tree down, it is not ordinarily done at once, but several blows; it is a successive action; every stroke doth something toward it, but the thing is accomplished by degrees, it falls not till the last be given; and thus God often proceeds gradually to the destruction of such sinners; he first *kills them by Prophets*, and afterwards by his own hand; he first smites them with spiritual plagues, and after that with temporal Judgments. It is true, God sometimes to shew his power and the strength of his hand, useth a sharp ax, and strikes a fearful blow, by which he cuts them down at once, but for the most part he doth it by divers Judgments successive; and it is to be observed that every thing which God doth to them, after once he hath clapt the curse and seal of his wrath upon them, is a stroke given towards their cutting down, a step directly to their ruine
Rev. 20. 20.

6. Cutting down is in order to casting out. When the Husbandman is come to this

this work, it saith that he is resolved this tree shall stand here no longer; and therefore as soon as that is done he presently throws it out of the vineyard; it is there to continue no longer: if he had intended it a room in his Orchard, he would have let it grow still, for it was because he could not endure to see it there that he thus dealt with it. Thus God, when he comes to bring this Judgment upon unfruitful professors, he removes them by it out of the visible Church, he takes them away from all relation, to, or benefit of the priviledges that hitherto they had enjoyed there. There is an Ordinance of Christ, instituted in his Church, whereby men are cut off from communion with his people, which is a ministerial cutting them down, and is a figure or token of what God himself will do to such if they repent not, but go on to provoke him.

7. Cutting down is for some other use. When the Owner cuts up his fig-tree, and casts it out of the Vineyard, he doth not throw it away and make no improvement of it; no, though it will not bear figs, yet it will make fires; and so it will not be altogether unprofitable, though it answers not the end of its planting, yet there is an use that he puts it to; he therefore makes it up into faggots, and so burns it as he hath occasion for it; and such is the improvement which God makes of such as did not serve and glorifie him

in his Church; he cuts them down, he destroys them; but still he makes use of them; though they are not fit to be vessels of honour, yet he makes them vessels of dishonour, and that also turns to his honour and glory. There is an hell which God hath prepared for the exalting of the glory of his revenging Justice in; and there are the monuments on whom this glory is exalted, and in whom it is manifested eternally: now such as being fruitless in the vineyard, provoke God to cut them down, are thus disposed of by him, and he is so glorified in them for ever: he is known in his Judgments which he executeth; thus are the tares and the chaff, which grow together with the good grain in the field, disposed of, *Mat. 13. 30. 3. 12.* thus, the tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire, *verse 10.*

2. Why it must come to this when Gods patience is wearied?

A. This will be evident by the consideration of these things?

1. These were all of them heirs of destruction before in their natural state. All those that are planted in Gods Vineyard, were at the first transplanted out of the Wilderness; there was no difference in them from others, but what God was pleased to make by bringing them under the Gospel, so the Apostle tells his Ephesians, *Eph. 2. 12*: yea he assures them that, They were by nature Children of

of wrath even as others, *verse. 3.* All mankind were fallen under condemnation by sin ; God in his mercy picks up whom he pleaseth among these, and puts them under the means of Salvation, where he makes the offers, and proposeth the terms of it unto them ; but still this is their natural estate. God therefore puts his people in mind of what they were, when he first looked upon them, *Ezek. 16. 3* ; God for this end appointed a remembrance to be solemnly observed by the children of Israel, and to be after at the appointed time openly acknowledged, *Deut. 26. 5*. Now mens meerly being in the visible Church doth not really alter this state, but only puts them under the advantage for it, and affords to them a merciful treaty, in which God transacts with them about it.

2. Hence it was only Gods meer patience which reprieved them from that destruction all this while. There was nothing in them to lay him under the obligation to do it. Men are not in themselves any thing the better Morally for being in the visible Church ; they have the same nature in them, the same evil heart cleaving to them. It alters indeed their outward estate, but that in it self doth not change their hearts ; nor are they at all changed, as long as they remain barren, that very thing is an evidence that they are the same men still : It therefore can be
nothing

nothing but patience that keeps ruine from them. It cannot be thought rationally, that God is the less provoked by them, because they are within the pale, whilst they abide unfruitful, than he is with others, or that their sin is less, because they are there, no, but a great deal more: they are a trial to his patience, they live upon it, it is that only keeps them from perishing.

3. The end of patience being thus altogether frustrate, there now remains nothing else but destruction for them. Why did God bear and wait? it was not for nothing; no, it was to see if they would comply with him, and do him service; if they would repent of their sins, and believe in Christ, and do good works; but they do no such thing, but continue to be obstinate, they out-stand all the essays that are used with them, and dishonour God by so doing, and now they are fit for nothing else: the sentence was out before, it was only sloop upon this trial; and after all it avails not; what else is there to be done, but to give it its scope? hence that, *John 3. 18. he that believes not, is condemned already.* We find therefore that God upon this very ground, enters into a solemn deliberation with these, *Hos. 6. 4. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee, &c. and Jer. 5. 7. How shall I pardon thee for this?*

4. And

4. And this abuse of his patience must needs heighten the provocation, for now it is reduced to this exigence, that there is no other course remains to be taken. When upon trial made, men prove hopelesst, things are brought to that pass, that there is nothing else now be done; and not only so, but all that hath bin thus done for them, would else be wholly lost, and God should have no Glory at all by it: here is so much more guilt added as there have been means used, and neglected offers of Grace made and despised: If therefore sinners in the World must perish, for their falling short of the Glory of God; sinners in the visible Church much more for offering abuse and contempt to these essays that have been used with them, to bring them to Repentance. It is certain that such though they have outward priviledges above them, yet in reality they are to God esteemed no better than Heathen, *Amos. 9: 7: Are ye not as Children of the Ethiopians to me? Oh Israel! saith the Lord.* Those wild Theevish, Cursed inhabitants of *Arabia* were as good as they: nay these are worse, because they have sinned against greater mercies.

3. Wherein the dreadfulnes of this destruction may be discovered.

A. That the destruction of all sinners is a fearful thing, must be acknowledged by all such as have any acquaintance with the nature

ture of the threatening of the Law, and the curse which is contained therein; but the ruine of those that have had the privilege of the Gospel, and a room in the vineyard, and are there cut down, is more peculiarly amazing and terrible, as having some aggravations in it which the other hath not, especially if we consider;

1. That God hath threatned these with more intolerable punishments: and he stands concerned for it in point of honour, that so he may be no loser in the end by any of his Creatures, which he should be, if he should not make such to be more eminent and observable instances of his displeasure. This therefore is the doom which Christ hath past upon the places where he had bin most conversant, and those with whom he had taken the greatest pains, *Mat. 11. 20, &c.* If then they that suffer the easiest hell, suffer beyond our conception, how much more astonishing must the suffering of these be?

2. That those have more to lose than others. The punishment of loss, is no little part of the misery of sinners; and indeed that makes way for the Punishment of sense, which is introduced and greatly aggravated by it. The higher men have been lifted up the greater is their fall, now these have been exalted to Heaven, *Matth. 11. 23.* The Vine-
yard

yard priviledges wee have seen to be many and great, all these are lost at once when the sinner is cut down. They were taken near to God, they were under his peculiar favours, they were *not far from the Kingdom*, they had fair and good hopes set before them, and all helps to have brought them to life and salvation; but now they are thrown out of all; they are little things that others lose, in comparison with what these are cut off from.

3. That hence they have more to torment them with the thought of when they are cut down. No little part of the misery of the damned consists in those reflections of Conscience, which as a never dying worm will be gnawing upon them, and the more will it torment the man. How much then will this mans Conscience have to afflict him with all in the place of miseries? there to remember that he was once near Salvation. he had all the opportunities for it, all the renders of Grace made to him, and the stirrings of the Holy Spirit following of him, so many days of patience waiting upon him; all of which he negligently, nay wilfully slighted; *Christ would have gathered him, and he would no;* God would have saved him, and he rejected it; heaven and happiness waited upon him to be made his, and he scorned them. These though poor Heathen will not be acquainted withal.

withal. There is no wood will burn so fiercely and make so hot a fire, as that of a barren fig-tree, when it is cut down, and cast into unquenchable flames.

U S E

All the Improvement that I shall make of this Doctrine, is in this one Use ; Let it be a warning-peal to all the Sinners in Zion ; to awaken you from your security, and make you afraid any longer to live unprofitably under the Gospel and Ordinances : and if there be any solemnity in this truth, make it your own, and lay it to heart ; and there are these two things which I would entreat of you that you would, for that end, employ your serious thoughts about.

1. Think what reason there is for you to expect that Gods patience is almost wearied out with you : possibly you may be ready to please your selves with contrary imaginations ; and say there is no fear at all ; but be not brutish and foolish ; and that none concerned herein may be omitted, in this warning, let me press it upon :

1. Young Sinners ; you that are in your prime, and ready to think that this admonition little concerns you : you will say that God hath waited but a little while upon you, and therefore you may well expect a longer day : but remember what you were told under another Doctrine, that

Gods patience is arbitrary; and that where he hath afforded more of light, and clearer dispensations; and used more earnest endeavours, he may count three years a great while, but let me add;

1. Consider that God is ever and anon taking away of such as you are. How many young persons have been slain by the Sword? how many such have been cut down by the late raging sickness? and doth this say nothing to you? if you dy in your youth, and in your sins, this threatening is then verified upon you: this present season is your day, and it may be all the day that you shall ever have; and when God comes to expose such as you are in his Providence, it speaks loudly to you, and tells you that his day may be near an end with you.

2. Consider that if you ripen in wickedness apace, it is a sad sign that you are making great haste to be ready for cutting down; and are there no young ones among us that are concerned in this? who not only live in a state of unregeneracy, but also grow vain, and profane, and lewd! are there none of our Children that have learnt to curse and swear, and profane Gods holy Sabbaths? that shake off the yoke of family Government, and keep company with riotous persons? that have been privately by their Parents, and publickly in the Ordinances warned, and reprov'd, and yet have despised all, and wilfully pursue their old courses, and grow worse and worse

Worse after all ; and have you not heard that when it comes to this ; that persons will not be reformed, they are then next to past hope ? and what but destruction belongs to such ? and if it be so, with you, as young as you are, you are old enough for God to make monuments of his holy jealousy, see for this, Jer. 5. 7, 8, 9.

2. Old Sinners ; you that have been suffered a great while in the vineyard, and yielded to the Owner of it no profit at all ; have not you abundant reason to look continually when Gods patience shall turn into fury, and that fury fall upon you in its weight ? surely you have cause to dread the thoughts of it every hour ; Consider then,

1. How much you have done to weary him out. You have much more cause to wonder that he hath born with you so long, than to promise your selves that he will wait upon you longer : how often have you grieved him, vexed his holy Spirit ? what innumerable affronts have you put upon him ? count over the many Sabbaths which you have enjoyed, the Sermons that you have heard, the Convictions that you have had, the mercies that have been bestowed upon you, the afflictions that have come to awaken you, and the ill improvement that you have made of all these, the grievous contempt that you have cast upon them all : What Husbandman would have suffered such a tree so long undestroyed, that

had been planted and cherished in his Orchard?

2. Consider the *Ax lies at your root*. God hath brought it thither; are there none of the fore-runners of your ruine come upon you? are there no spiritual beginnings towards it? doth not the spirit of God begin to withdraw his strivings in the means of grace? do you not find your selves more careless and secure under, and more impenetrable by the Word of God which is dispensed to you? are you not more delighted with, and more violently set in your hearts to live still in your sinful courses? are there no temporal fore-runners of this? do not Gods Servants proclaim his wrath awfully against you? doth not Gods Providence raise up evil, and fearful judgments against you? are there not those infirmities and sicknesses, which are the presage of death upon you? these all have a voice in them.

2. Think now what a terrible thing it is to be cut down for your barrenness. *Do not make a mock at destruction*, but be afraid of excision; consider therefore,

1. What a loss you will then sustain. Then will you lose all at once, and for ever. You are then cast out of the vineyard, and all the advantages of it are gone, no more to be recruited: then you will have no more Sabbaths, no more counsels, and instructions,

no more warnings and calls, no more secret strivings of the Spirit of God, no more day of grace, no more hopes of salvation to Eternity. Is it a light matter with you now to think of losing all these? I can assure you that it will not be so in the recognition: when you shall look back from the pit whither you are going, *and from whence there is no returning*, and there remember all these things, it will be a far more bitter *memento* than *Jerusalem* was in the Land of *Assyria*.

2. What an account you will have to give in to God when he shall come to cut you down. Then will you wish that you had never grown in such a Soil, been within such a pale, enjoyed so much cost and labour as was laid out upon you: then will you wish that you had grown in the remotest Desert, where God and Christ had never been heard of. When God shall count up to you all that he hath done for you, all the priviledges which you enjoyed by his benignity, all the free offers that he made to you, and endeavours which he industriously used with you, to persuade you to give up your selves to his fear, and service, and all the patience with which he waited upon you, and all the wilful scorn and contumely which you cast upon this; and it will be a most fearful reckoning.

3. What plagues you will then suffer. Did you now know and consider what shall be then

then done with the fruitless fig-tree, when it is cut down, what more especial examples of Gods severe revenge such shall be made, who had once all the means of grace waiting upon them, what a seven times heated furnace of fiery indignation these shall be cast into, one would think it should make their hearts ake, and their joynts tremble; and Oh that God would in rich mercy set home the impression of these thoughts upon you now; that yet *at the least in this your day, you would mind the things of your peace, before the last sand of Gods patience be run out, and so these things be hidden from you*: might it but drive you to Christ, bewailing heartily your barrenness, and earnestly supplicating of him for his sanctifying Spirit, to make you fruitful, there would be *still hope in Israel for this thing.*

SERMON XI

DOCTRINE III.

That unfruitful Professors are not only unprofitable in, but also very hurtful to Gods Vineyard.

THIS the Landlord insinuates as a reason why he will have this figtree to be cut down, *why cumberst it the ground!* Not only, why doth it bear no fruit; why doth it do no good? why doth it make me to lose all my cost and care about it? The word [*cumber*] as was formerly intimated, signifies, to render a thing idle, to make it to do no work; and it is *the ground* that it doth this detriment unto: and under this resemblance we may take the occasion to observe how not only useless, but mischievous too, barren professors are in the visible Church: and there are several things by which it may be illustrated.

1: A barren fruit-tree in a vineyard is a very great disgrace to it. The credit of a vineyard, is that it yields much fruit: this

is it which gains it esteem, and makes it to be preferred before the wilderness. Every tree then that bears proportionably, confers its share to this credit, and consequently, any one that bears nothing diminisheth from it, and is oftentimes more taken notice of than the others that do bear; & it is certain, that there is a great deal of reproach that accrues to the Church of Christ, by the occasion of those in it that do not bring forth the fruits which God requires of them. As God expects more, so men look for more of such than of others. and as it is a shame for such who make an eminent profession, and have so many advantages for it, to do nothing for the glory of God, so the reflexion is wont to be made upon the whole, and the Church of Christ which they appertain unto must have dirt cast upon them for it; and they shall suffer more reproach for one such, than get commendation from an hundred exemplary Christians, from the world, who envy them their reputation, and wait for matter of scandal against them. This is one argument *Paul* useth with the Jews to convince them, *Rom. 2. 24.* men are ready to measure all by that one, these are your Church-Members, these are the Children of the Church, that have owned the Covenant, and openly professed their subjection thereunto, and yet such they are, and so they live; and what shall we

Judge of the rest of them? Thus Christ's Vineyard gets a bad name by such as these.

2. A barren tree in the vineyard, takes up the room which might be better employed. There is a considerable quantity of ground allowed for a tree to stand and grow in: he who plants an Orchard, allows convenient distances, for the trees to spread themselves in, & to have the advantage of the Sun-beams, that they may have the help afforded them that is requisite for their flourishing, and bearing of fruit: now if the tree be unfruitful, all this ground is lost, and left idle, as to any profit, it is as good to have nothing at all upon it, as that which yields nothing; and that must needs be a cumber: and in the mean while it occupies the place in which another that would bear, might stand; The same ground would do for a fruitful tree, that is lost upon a barren one; and if there were such an one there, the same ground and the same tillage would be serviceable for something; whereas this turns to no account at all. Unregenerate Sinners, that do nothing for God, take up as much room in the visible Church as others, they have a like outward priviledges with them; but the room they occupy is lost as to them: if in their stead there were such as love God, as fear and serve him, such means and advantages would

would forward them abundantly, and what a cumber must God needs account this to be ?

3. Hence, a barren tree in a vineyard draws away the sap and strength of the ground to no purpose. The ground spends, and its vertue is as much exhausted by maintaining a barren tree, as one that bears never so much fruit: it sucks away its vertue, and makes it require as much mending, and all for nothing: and this is really mischievous to it. It is the same Soil to appearance, the same fruitful hill in which Hypocrites and formal Professors are planted, that sincere Christians grow in, for *Gods vineyard is upon a fruitful hill, Isa. 5. 1.* and the same means are used with them, the same cost is laid out upon the one and the other, so far as concerns means, for God demands *what he could do more, verse 3.* and it is by a formal improvement of these, that an Hypocrite maintains his profession, and makes such a flourish in those leaves which he bears. It is from the vineyards fatness that he sucks up his formality, makes his brags and boasts, and by which he upholds himself, or else he would wither away quickly; and by this means it comes to be spent unprofitably, and to damage.

4. Hence, *all that is done to the barren tree, is thrown away upon it. All the digging and mending*

ending, all the showers and dews which fall upon it, all the warm sunbeams that influence it turn to no account, because it is barren still: for if it bears no fruit it doth nothing to answer the end for which it was there planted. And thus it is in respect of such as bring forth no spiritual fruit in the Church of God: not only do they themselves miss of their end and Gods just expectation, but all that is done for them doth, for the present, prove frustrate also: That God will be no loser in the end by them, is no thank to them, they do all that in them lies to defeat him; and did not his Infinite Wisdom know how to make his penniworths out of them, he should never get any thing by them. But however, the direct and next end of all means being their serving God, and doing good works, this is altogether frustrated by them. all the Sabbaths they enjoy, and Ordinances they partake in are lost, all the dews of Heaven that fall upon them are dried up, and no good comes of them; all the mercies & afflictions that are expended on them make them worse. the Stone wall, & Wine-press. and Tower are kept up and repaired in vain as to them: and, in as much as they belong to the Vineyard, that is also damnified hereby.

5. A Barren tree in a vineyard doth damage to all the plants that grow near it. It is not only useless in it self, but others that are planted within it's verge and shadow are damnified by it, they are great sufferers for its

its vicinity, it draws away the sap from them which might have nourished, and made them more fruitful; it shades them, keeps off the influences of the Sunbeams from them, and so they are stunted, their flourishing is prevented by it, and their fruit hath neither so good a colour nor taste as else it would and this is much to the vineyards detriment. And truly empty and barren professors in the visible Church, do a great deal of harm to others in the society which they belong unto, and especially to such as they have the most intimate converse withal: and there are several ways in which they are harmful to others and hinder bearing: especially;

1. Such as these encourage one another by evil counsels, and society, in their unprofitable and pernicious courses: and by this means they wonderfully hinder the efficacy of the means of grace upon them, how many good motions of the Spirit upon their Souls are by these ways quenched; the word of God takes hold of this or that barren soul in an ordinance, and leaves awakenings upon him, and this is one step to fertility, if it were followed; but he gets among his vain lewd companions, and they draw him away again to his former courses, and make him to lose all those impressions which he had upon his mind: and if they observe any disquietment to be upon his spirit, they either
mock

mock or collouge him out of it. How do vain young men strengthen each other in wickedness, and harden one anothers hearts against the fear of God ! how often have there been good hopes that these and those might have been perswaded to return to God, and lay hold on *Jesus Christ*, if they had not lived in such houses, or associated themselves with such persons, where they have been encouraging one another in wickedness, and been learning each of the other to laugh at the counsels and warnings of God, and to *make a mock of sin*, and flout at Godliness, thus are we told, *Eccl. 9. 18. one sinner destroyeth much good.*

2. Their example is pernicious to many, and especially the example of those who talk much, and speak high of Religion, and have made a more open profession of the Covenant of God : and this more principally in reference to such as have a peculiar relation to or dependance upon them ; such are Parents in respect to their Children, Family Governours relating to them that are under their watch ; when possibly they keep up a form of Godliness, as to matters of external worship ; they read the Word, and pray in their families, and Catechise their Children ; are constant in frequenting Ordinances ; and in the mean while, they are careless in their conversation, are vain and
frothy.

frothy in their communication, quarrellsome and give ill language in their passion, deceitful in their dealings with men, loose in their ordinary carriage, and too excessive in their allowances of themselves in the using, or rather abusing the things of this life : oh what an influence have such examples upon others? how can they draw them down into self-justification? and plead, that if such things were not consistent with Christianity, these would not so do : such persons are the Devils Decoys with which he draws men into the snare, and keeps them from devoting themselves wholly to the Service of God, and doing the works of Righteousness, see how *Paul* acquits himself from any such thing as this, *1 Thef. 2. 10* *Ye are Witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly, and unblameably we behaved our selves among you that believe.*

3. They many times damp the graces of true believers; and thereby they prevent their bearing so much fruit as else they would. The fruit that God looks for, is the exercise of those Graces which he hath put into us. They therefore that have no Grace, can bear no fruit; they that have it, may be hindred by occasion of some obstruction given to their grace in its exercise : a bearing tree may by some casualty miss a season; and how oft doth the Society of Carnal professors

fectors hinder Christians in their work ? Gods Children draw out each others Grace, by mutual excitation ; and they are many times damped and suppressed by vain communication ; and carnal professors do much this way, by offering vain converse, unprofitable discourse, and often by stirring up the corruptions of the Godly, for they also have a body of Death, which is sometimes set on going, & advantaged by the communication of others, and none more like to do it, than such as are themselves without the root of the matter in them.

4. These do oftentimes set themselves to oppose the power of Godliness ; and this produceth pernicious effects among visible professors. and it is not unusual that these that are most zealous for set forms, are most opposite to the power. Such were the *Pharisees*, who were great, sticklers for the traditions of their fathers, but would neither enter into the Kingdom of Heaven themselves nor suffer them that would. And it is certain, that when men dwindle away into formality, the Life of Religion is wanting, how then should the good fruits of it appear ? and what woful ruines this hath brought to Christianity, and how it hath almost brought the Visible Church into a Wilderness of profaness and immorality, is awfully to be observed and while men spend their time and thoughts in things

things of little or no moment, meer shadows, they lose the substance, and there is but a lifeless carcass of Religion left among them.

6. All this barrenness turns to the owners damage. He in the mean while hath not his revenue coming in : it is his cost and care that is laid out on the Vineyard, and he loseth it when this and that tree returns him no fruit. Gods name is greatly dishonoured by such professors ; it is his tribute which is due to him from his vineyard, that by this occasion is not paid to him : and this also is to the grief of his people that fear him : all that, being in the Church, are sincerely devoted to God, and set for his glory, are greatly grieved, when they see that he is not acknowledged by such as bear his name, and partake in his Gospel favours, Psal. 119. 165. *Rivers of tears run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy Law :* and as long as such are in the vineyard, the Godly are kept in mourning, and their hearts are sorrowful, and this is a great cumber to them.

U S E I.

For Conviction ; it shews the great equity of Gods cutting down such as these. It saith that there is no injustice with God when he

to doth; nay that he doth nothing but what is proper and requisite: let it therefore tell all such, what reason you have to expect it; if a tree doth no good, and a great deal of hurt, what shall be done with it else? and that you may see and be convinced of this, let me offer these things:

1. Gods tenderneſſ hath been already declared to you, in and by all that patience which he hath uſed with you, and the coſt that he hath laid out upon you. God will for ever be acknowledged, and you ſhall be enforced to confeſs, that he did not deal with you as he might have done, that he did not execute all the rigour of his Juſtice upon you which you deſerved: hear how Chriſt expoſtulates with *Jeruſalem* in this regard, *Mat. 23. 37.* your very ſtation in his Church: all the offers of grace made to you; and all the ſtrivings of his holy ſpirit with you, and all the long time wherein he waited upon you, will witneſs for him, that you undid your ſelves, that you were the blameable cauſe of your own deſtruction: every time that he came and ſaid to you, *Oh turn! why will you die? receive inſtruction & live;* which you ſlighted, will ſay that you undid your ſelves.

2. Gods Wiſdom is now deeply concerned in this matter. If after all, you remain barren, you cannot expect but that a wiſe God will deal with you ſo, as ſhall commend that wiſ-

dom of his to the world : and therefore, what would be acknowledged to be wisdom in him that owns a vineyard, in his dealing with a barren tree in it, must be much more justified in Gods dealings with, and proceedings against you, for not serving of him, here then,

1. There is no loss to the Owner in cutting such a tree down. It never did any good by standing there ; it brought in no profit to the husbandman ; his revenue will be never the less when that is gone : and what glory will God lose by you, when you are destroyed ? you never did him any service since you were born ; he hath been at a great deal of cost upon you, but there hath no good at all come of it ; you have stood in the vineyard, but all that you have done hath bin to make a shew, to take up a room there ; but if none in his Church should do him more service than you have done, he might even throw it up to the waste Wilderness again, for any revenue that is paid him ; and is it not wisdom to remove an unprofitable Creature from the earth, and lay out no more upon it to no purpose ?

2. There is a great deal of harm occasioned by letting such a tree stand any longer. *It cumbereth the ground* : it doth mischief in the place that it takes up ; and is it not prudence in the Owner, to root up a tree that not
only

only doth no good, but much damage? if he could Bear with the former, yet this is an intolerable provocation. Every unregenerate sinner among Gods people doth mischief, others are the worse for him, and therefore it is fitting that God, who is resolved to be no loser by any, should take such away from doing any more: so many years as they have been born with, hath exercised his patience.

3. Hence it is for the good of others that such should be cut down. God hath a care for his vineyard in general, and for those Plants in it in particular as do bear fruit: It is for the sake of the Righteous ones there that he keeps it up! and therefore he will take care for their good. And indeed there is great benefit accrues to others by such judgments of God; It sometimes doth good by awakening of others that were unfruitful before, and hastning their Conversion; the destruction of one impenitent sinner, is sometimes the occasion of the repentance of many: sometimes it gives great advantage to Gods Children, by removing hindrances of their growth out of the way, and awakning and exciting of the graces that are in them.

4. It is the only way that is now left for God to get honour by such as these what would you have God to do with you? serve and honour him you will not, he hath tried and waited, and all to no purpose, you grow

worse and worse after all, and shall he lose by such as you? shall he make a Creature, and do all for him, and have no honour by him? if he have, in what other way is it to be had? Let this then stop every mouth, and vindicate an Holy God in all the severity which he proceeds unto after his patience is wearied out

USE. II.

For Information in two particulars.

1. This tells us how admirable Gods forbearance is towards unregenerate sinners under the Gospel. That he should wait so long, from one year to another, and see how they neglect his grace, and dishonour his name, and yet still he holds his hand back, and not fall upon them in his fury, pluck them up and cast them out of his vineyard: are they such a cumber, do they do no good and withall do such a world of harm to others? It must needs be a matter of astonishment to think that God should not long ago have bin weary with waiting upon them, that he hath not rid himself of Creatures so burdensom to him: Nay it should commend the grace of God to his own Children, who

consider

consider how little they bear, how short they come of answering Gods just expectation, yea and how much their little fruitfulness doth bring of dishonour to God, and offer of scandal to the Gospel.

2. Here see a reason why God sometimes takes away his Gospel, and the means of grace from a people. There is a parity of reason between a tree in the vineyard, and the vineyard it self; especially if we consider that it consists of individual trees: If then a fig-tree waited upon to no purpose, abiding barren after all, must come to *cutting down* at last, what may be expected concerning an Orchard of trees, when they come to be all, or most part so? The whole ground that they grow in is lost, and *embred* by them. Well then may it be expected, that God will not long keep up the *fence* about such a piece of ground, so unprofitable to him. It may therefore put a people upon serious enquiry, when God begins to lay them waste by desolating Judgments, whether it be not so with them: and it is an awful truth, that though God sometimes keeps up the pale, continues the Gospel, for the sake of a few that are precious to him, and do honour him by their fertility; yet when degeneracy overspreads, and those few can do no good, he *plucks up the hedger, and lays open the vineyard*; and if it be a thing so pernicious for a vineyard to be barren,

barren, God is to be Justified, and his prudence to be acknowledged in such a dispensation of severity as this is.

U S E III.

This may serve to humble and abase us for all our barrenness. Are there not too many of us that have never done any thing for God in sincerity, that have brought no glory to his name at all, that have lived in their sins, and despised all the means used with them? and is it not a matter of shame and sorrow to you, to think what kind of creatures you are, what God esteems of you, and what you do really prove your selves to be? a meer burden to the places you live in? Oh! how low should it lay us? how vile should it make us to be in our own eyes, to think that we are not only good for nothing, but that we also do mischief? the places we dwell in suffer by us; we do not serve God our selves, and we hinder others also from serving him as they might, and we hereby expose them to the anger of God, and pull down a great deal of his wrath upon our people; and it is enough to make the best of us to blush at our selves, when we consider that so much barrenness, so much cumber: that all our short comings in living answerable to our profession, & Gods expense upon us, are not only to our own loss, but the damage of the whole.

U S E IV.

Let it be a word of awakening to every one, especially to such as have been in Gods Vineyard, and have not to this day closed in with Christ, or glorified God by believing in his Son, and giving themselves up to his service. You think it is no great matter; but you here see what an account God puts upon it; you please your selves that God can easily bear with you, especially, if you do not run out into these scandalous excesses that some others are overtaken withal; but you see here what is the brand that is set upon a tree that doth not bear, meerly for that; not because it bears *wild grapes*, but because it bears no *good fruit*, it is a *cumber*; and one would think that should be enough to terrifie you, to think that you are so far from being profitable, that you are a burden to God; how loudly doth it speak the dreadful peril that you are in? it tells you what you may every moment expect from him. Who would not ease himself of a load, and discharge his ground of a *cumber*? God gives this for a reason why this tree is to be *cut down*; and if you are so, it saith that you are under the peril of this doom every day; and what is the voice of this

this Conviction, but to stir you up to be no longer so? and let it also rouse the believers to more renewed endeavours after fruitfulness, considering that if no fruit makes one a *cumber*, little fruit is little better; and consequently that the way for you to become great blessings to the Church of God, and acceptable to God himself, and to enjoy a stable settlement of abode in his Church, and to do much good there in your Generation, is to be abounding in the service of God, and deeply engaged in those works of holiness and righteousness, which he hath required of his people. This will be the way to prevent excision, and to enjoy all merciful tillage, and the tender care of God for you.

Sermon



SERMON XII

*Verse 8. And he answering said unto him,
Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall
digg about it and dung it.*

III. **T** He Fourth and last part of the *Para-*
ble comes now to be considered *Viz:*
the interposition or intercession of the *Vine-*
dresser for this tree, In which he humbly sets
himself to delay the execution of the sentence
that had been past upon it, and accordingly
pleads with his Lord for a little forbearance;
we are not to think that man is more patient
than God is, but it shews us what is mans du-
ty, and what use God is pleased to make of man
in his providential dispensations. Here then
observe.

1. The thing he petitions for, *Let it alone this
year also.*

2. A reason of his request, *Till I shall digg a-
bout*

hout it, and dung it. Under which is contained a promise of his using renewed endeavours with it.

3. The Issue which he joyns with his Lord in upon a double *Hypothesis*, *verse 9.* of which afterwards.

1. Let us observe the thing which he petitions for, *Let it alone this year also.* Where consider.

1. The mercy it self which he pleads for; *Let it alone*: the word signifies, *to remit*: and is often used for the pardoning of sin; but it here intends, a suspending of the sentence past; and the meaning is, do not cut it down, but let it still stand in the vineyard: and enjoy the benefit of it.

2. The limitation of this request, *This Year*; i.e. one season more; he is modest in his request, and yet he would fain have one trial more be made of it.

3. An argument insinuated in the word, *also.* q. d. thou hast had much patience towards it already, and it is but a little that I ask; it is but one trial more, and that cannot be so much as thou hast made already. To Wave all particular observations that might here be made, we may from the whole gather this,

DOCTRINE.

It is the disposition of Gods faithful Ministers to be very earnest with him to stay his judgments, when they are ready to break in upon and destroy barren Professors.

When they see the tokens of Gods anger appearing, and are apprehensive of the great danger impending; they presently address God, and go to him with greatest importunity, entreating him that he would at least spare them a little give them a little farther trial, and see what may be done with them. That God is pleased to discover his displeasure to them, and give them some signal tokens that there is wrath out against such, and ready to break forth in some terrible dispensations, sometimes discovering it in its moral causes, and sometimes in the Face of his providence, hath been already evidenced. And what is it they now do? do they sit still, and do nothing? or do they rejoice in it, and seek the fartherance of it? no, but they do all they can to prevent it, and this is one thing, they apply themselves unto God by humble and earnest supplication, they turn importunate beggars at the Throne of Grace in their behalf. Instances for this we have several in the word of God, in such as have been the most eminent;

How

How observable is the example of Abraham, in his interceding for Sodom, on supposition that there might be a scattering of Godly persons in it? and how doth he grow upon God in his pleading?

Gen. 18. *How eminent was Moses also upon this account how often are we told of the great provocations that God had taken at Israel? and as often we find Moses upon his Face, begging and pleading as for his life, and not letting God alone, Forty days at a time did he spend more then once upon this very score. How ready is Aaron to step in with his Censer between the living and the dead, when he saw the Plague was now begun? How did Joshua fall down and pray hard when Israel fled before their enemies?*

How did the prophet Jeremiah pray for a degenerate People near destruction, even till God bad him to pray no more but to let him alone? and these are to Characterize such as are in publick place among Gods People, and to let us know what spirit they are of. Here then may we enquire,

1. Whence it is that this disposition comes to be so active in Godly Ministers?

2. Wherein it appears acceptable to God, and advantageous unto Barren Souls?

1. Whence is it that this disposition comes to be so active in Godly Ministers?

A. We may come at this in a few steps;

1. There is Planted in Man by Nature a
Love

Love to Mankind. Meerly sensible creatures have such an instinct of Nature in them, that they stand affected to their own kind; Ravening Wolves, and Cruel Tygers do participate in this: And this had a more peculiar impression upon reasonable creatures, whose understanding hath a capacity of reasoning it self into, and stirring up of these affections. And although it be one of the unhappy fruits of mans Apostacy, that it hath wofully depraved this principle, and made men *without natural affection* having at least destroyed the gracious impression which was upon this principle, yet there is the root of such an inclination abiding in the hearts of men, and a disposition in them to exert it in a natural, though not in a gracious way.

2. The Grace of God, where it comes, restores this principle again to its regular activity. It is the work of Sanctifying grace to restore the lapsed nature of man to a capacity of acting according to the Image of God which once it had upon it. It Sanctifies the understanding, by discovering to it what is the love which we ow one to another, and wherein it ought more peculiarly to exert it self, according to the state and condition of the object of it, and shews them that their souls are more deeply concerned in this than their bodies; that their eternal well-being is more to be sought than their temporal felicity. And

it Sanctifies the Will by enabling it to elect accordingly: and this influenceth the Affections making them to desire, long after, and sollicitously pursue this designe: it turns that love which before was carnal into an holy love.

3. This love makes them exceeding loth that any should perish; and consequently grieved at the apprehension of the danger of it. It is an Affection full of compassion; and therefore misery and danger of the Object greatly moves it. How much of this was exemplarily found in the man *Christ*, who wept over *Jerusalem*? *Luk.* 19. 41. and made that bitter moan over it, *Mat.* 23. 37. and this made *Paul* to speak with tears in his eyes to his *Philippians*, *Phil.* 3. 18, 19. Godly Men cannot but be deeply concerned to see Sinners running to ruine, and ready to drop into destruction; to think that such as are capable of glory, should fall into endless misery; to see the hand of God up, and ready to strike that blow which will cut them off for ever from all hope; fills their souls with deepest commiseration of them, and makes them wish it might be prevented.

4. This lothness and grief of theirs puts them upon studying and endeavouring all they may to prevent it. For that is the very nature and use of this affection; and it is very prevalent in the souls of Gods people.

Such

Such an one will now entertain himself with these thoughts : Is there nothing that I may do to save this soul ? may I be no ways instrumental of good to him, that so he may not go down to the pit ? are there no endeavours that may be used with or for him, that may, by the blessing of God, prove beneficial to him ? he is willing and desirous to do his utmost, and omit nothing that comes within his reach, that may be serviceable to this purpose. This made *Paul* to be so laborious, *if by any means he might save men.*

5. This makes them to go to God and plead with him, that he would spare them a little longer. They are not without hope that if they might have a little more time allowed them, they might at length be persuaded to mind the things of their peace : to be sure they know, that if they are once cut down by the hand of God's vengeance, there will then be no more opportunity for them for ever, that all hopes are then gone, that then the day of grace is done. but whilst there is life and means, there is hope : and this makes them to pray hard for them, and follow the Throne of Grace in their behalf : and the more their danger is, the greater importunity it urgeth them unto : This made *Samuel* so restlessly importunate for *Saul*.

6. Gods faithful Ministers are usually more deeply sensible of the miserable condition
that

that such are in, than others are. Every true believer hath more or less of this sense? it flows from the Grace that is in them: but those Gracious souls whose peculiar business lies in the contemplation of the Scriptures, & acquainting of themselves, that so they may acquaint others with the great and awful truths therein contained, must needs have some special impressions of these things made upon their hearts, and this must needs work answerably on their affections. That was it which so engaged *Paul* he knew the terrors of the Lord, 2. Cor. 5. 11. Yea, and God oftentimes gives them more experimental knowledge of themselves and that adds unto the Affection matter of incitement.

7. The special relation which these bear to such, makes them peculiarly sollicitious for them. They are not only related to them as their fellow reasonable Creatures, but also as God hath Commissionated them to bring the Gospel of peace unto them, and labour with them for their saving goods: they are therefore tender of them; they are their charge, and they are to them as so many children: they have travailling pains for them, that they may be made partakers in saving Grace and brought to Christ: thus *Paul* argues with his *Galatians*, Gal. 4. 19. And who is so much grieved at the childrens disaster as the mother, and therefore none will beg harder for them than she.

8. They must needs be exceeding loth that all the labour which they have laid out upon these should thus be lost. Gods Servants, *that have obtained the grace to be faithful*, have been spending themselves in solicitous endeavours after the salvation of all those that are under their watch; they have laboured with God and with them; and the joy they have looked for, hath been to see them saved: In hope of this they have been chearful under all; and must they perish at last, and so all be thrown away? this, in this life, is exceeding bitter to them; *Paul* speaks it with grief, *Gal. 4. 11.* and such a thought puts a peculiar impression upon this affection, and raiseth them to the more earnestness in their pleadings with God.

9. And they truly design the glory of God in all this. All believers are set for Gods glory; his Ministers are specially advantaged for the promoting of it: now it is the glory of Gods grace which they are nextly and directly to aim at the furtherance of; for they are a Gospel Ministry; and that is then most gloriously advanced, when men are made the monuments of this Attribute. When therefore they see such to whom this grace hath been offered, now ready to be made a Sacrifice unto Justice for their contempt of it, they, not being hopeless but that Grace may still be advanced by them, put in for a

little respite to be afforded them : and the love to man excite pity in them, yet love to God, and the honour of his Name regulates them, as will be afterwards made evident.

2. Wherein it appears acceptable to God, and advantageons to barren souls, that these are thus earnest with God for them?

A. This will be evident by the Consideration of these things ;

1. That God hath by his Holy Spirit put such desires into his Servants. They are the product of his Grace in them ; and therefore we shall find that such as have been most eminent for Holiness, and most acquainted with God, have been most fervently engaged thus : *Abraham* Gods friend, *Moses*, who was in the *Mount* with God, *Paul*, that had been in the *Third Heaven*, and seen glorious things there ; and that which is the fruit of Gods grace in us must needs be acceptable to him ; whether he intends to do the thing or no, yet it pleaseth him that his Servants should request it of him ; for that may be our duty to ask, which it is not Gods Sovereign Pleasure to grant ; for the command, which is revealed, and not the decree, which is secret, is the rule in prayer. The Prophets therefore interposed most earnestly when God threatned most sharply.

2. God hath therefore in the Scripture made it their duty thus to put in and plead, when they

see his Judgments coming upon his people. When they apprehend that God is angry, and discover him as if he were coming to cut Sinners down in his wrath, now God would have these step in: for this reason, when God had threatned a terrible Calamity upon his people Israel, we find this to be urged as a precept at such a time, Joel. 2. 17. and Moses by Gods Appointment, sends Aaron with his Censer, when the plague is begun. These are some of those that are appointed to stand in the gap, and if when God comes in Displeasure, and finds them not there, it fares ill with his people.

3. God hath oftentimes a purpose to delay the execution of the sentence; and he honours these his Servants to be the instruments in it. God sometimes intends to give peculiar instances of his long-sufferance; and therefore when Sinners may be thought ripe for ruine, ready for cutting down, and the sentence is past in the threatening, he will yet give them a farther trial; now when it is so, he is wont to stir up the hearts of his servants to put in, and beg with greatest and undeniable importunity for it, whereupon he grants it to their requests; and it is for their sakes that he doth it. Thus we find, that God had certainly destroyed Israel, but that Moses interposed, and stood between him and them, and turned his wrath away, Psal. 106. 23. and this shews his approbation.

4. Hence it follows, that they do many

times prevail with God. Though sometimes it is come to that, that though *Noah, Job, Daniel* should pray for them, *they should only deliver their own souls*; yet it is not always so; if it be possible, such prayers shall prevail, and God not seldom doth thus answer them. There is many a Sinners life is saved by the earnest importunity of Gods Servants with him, they had died else: God gives their lives to these prayers, to testifie what an interest they have in him, and convince sinners themselves of their gracious acceptance with him. The very scope of this part of the Parable, is to let us know, that God spares many after they have provoked him to denounce some severe threatnings against them, and to tell us how it comes about that he so doth: it is not for any worthiness or merit of theirs, but because they have a deep share in his favour, and he will thus signalize it.

5. By this means the Judgment that was ready to cut them down, is deferred. When the Ax of Divine Vengeance was lifted up, and just falling down upon them to give them a deadly blow, these hold Gods hands, and keep them from doing execution: and now the Sinner is suffered to live a while longer; the mischief which he was falling into is diverted from him; and this is an advantage; every day and hour in which the condemned Creature is saved out of the pit,

is a rich favour to him, *Lam. 3. 22. It is the Lords mercy that we are not consumed*; and the rather because,

6. Thus they have a farther opportunity given them to seek an escape from that destruction, if they have but an heart to make use of it. How many wretched sinners have great reason to say; if I had died at such a time, when I was just at brink of the pit, and had a Sentence of Death upon me in my own apprehension, I had then certainly perished; I had gone to everlasting burnings; but God hath spared me, and given me a longer day of grace. Till the tree is cut down, all hopes concerning it are not utterly lost; but when it is destroyed, and the root is dead, then all hope is gone: and needs must it be a very great priviledge for a sinner to have farther day given him, and *a price continued in his Hand to get Wisdom*; if he *Wants an Heart* to it, it is his own wickedness; that he hath the opportunity, is Gods indulgence.

U S E I.

Learn hence how much Sinners are beholden to Gods faithful Ministers. As little as they love them, yea as much as they despise, and possibly hate them, yet they little know how much they do for them: many a time when

when Judgment was ready to have broken in, and Gods anger was kindled, and began to burn, these have stepped in, and given a stop to it. It is true, they dealt plainly and openly with such as live and lie in sin, and despise the offers of grace made in the Gospel; and this is their faithfulness: they have discovered Gods anger, and cannot but cry aloud, and call earnestly unto men; they cannot let them alone; they speak home, and this many times vexeth sinners; they love not to be disquieted; and this makes such to cry out of them, as if they were the only *Troublers of Israel*. Yea they are often put upon it to denounce the threatnings of the Word of God against men that will not repent; and foolish creatures are ready to say, we see what they would be at, they desire and long for our mischief: but little do they think the meanwhile, what deep resentments they entertain upon their hearts of these things; how the danger they are in affects them. As they cannot let sinners alone, so neither can they let God alone: they are as earnest in their supplications to him for them, as they are in their warnings of them: did you know what pleadings, what entreaties, what importunities, they are using in their behalf; how loth they are that you should perish, how earnest they are with God that he should save you, that he would turn you, and have

mercy

mercy upon you, it would make you to entertain better thoughts of them : nor can all your unworthy reflections upon them, turn them from so doing, though they grieve and account it to be hard measure, so *David*, *Psal.* 35. 13, 14. and *Jeremiah*, chap. 18. 20.

U S E II.

This tells us how sore a Judgment of God it is upon a degenerate people, when he takes such away from them. Well might that King let fall such a doleful lamentation as he did, over the bed of a dying Prophet, 2 Kings 13. 14. My Father! my Father! the Chariots of Israel, and the Horsemen thereof. The death of pious Ministers, in a time of sore calamity, when God is contending with his people in grievous Judgments, carries a great deal of the revelation of Gods displeasure in it, and is therefore an ill omen unto such a people, and if it be not laid to heart, it bodes so much the more awfully : read how the Prophet comments upon it, Isa. 57. 1, 2. these are they who are to put into the breach and make it up ; and if they fall there, it saith, that God will be held back no longer by their prayers, but the gap shall stand open, that mischiefs and miseries may come in as a Flood. What shall we then say of the late awful stroke of Gods hand, in the decease of that aged and faithful

ful servant of Christ, the renowned *Eliot* ? He died late enough for himself, but too soon for us ; whose Faith and Prayers were singularly serviceable for the interest of this poor People ; and eminently observable it is, that God so ordered it in his Providence that lest he should go away unlamented, the unhappy tidings of our fore loss and calamity at *Falmouth*, were brought the very day of his incineration, to put us into mourning, and adde solemnity to His Obsequies ; and I believe *New-England*. hath not many such gap men to lose, I could not but, upon so inviting an occasion, drop this interest tear upon his Tombstone.

U S E III.

Hence we must Cautiously interpret those imprecations, which Gods Faithful Prophets have sometimes used against impenitent sinners, on Scripture Record. We shall find of them in the *Psalms*, and Prophecies of *Jeremiah* : and some are ready to make a wrong improvement of them, and justify their own passionate wishes against others by them : It may be said of them, that they were men of like passions ; and all that is recorded concerning Holy Men in Scripture, is not commendable ; some such expressions might be
the

the boiling over of their corruption. But I suppose, there may be a better account given of them than so: viz: that they were men inspired, & delivered prophecies, and therefore did not declare their own desire (at least in such as were personal) but Gods purpose, which they sometimes delivered in plain E-nunciations, sometimes in Rhetorical imprecations, according as the Spirit of God suggested to them: hence we find, that they were mean while praying and interceding with God for their People, and protesting their integrity in so doing: and God is put upon it more than once, to forbid *Jeremiah* from praying for that People.

V S E IIII.

Let this Consideration be an argument to perswade with sinners to hearken to such as these, when they speak to them from God. If they are so earnest with God to Spare you, let them then be bid welcome, when they are earnest to perswade you *To Break off your Sins by Repentance*; to convince you of your barrenness, and unprofitableness, and excite you to fruitfulness: one would think this should give them a welcome reception: though they come to testify against your sins, and perswade you to part with your lusts and vanities

vanities and betake your selves unto God: and to this end that you may, be perswaded of these three things.

1. Belive that they know what is your concern. That they see your danger, and understand how the case stands between God and you; else they would not be so importunate with God, if they did not see evil to be threatening of you; and if they discover the tokens of Gods indignation, it is not to be slighted. God is wont to let them know what he is about to do, and to touch their heart with a deep sense of it: If therefore they tell you of an evill day nigh and accordingly warn you of the danger you are in by reason of your present state, it is not to be slighted, or made a light matter of. If they are faithful, God trusts them with his secret, and they cannot but truly declare the mind of God unto you as they find it; and it is your folly and damage too to be perswading yourselves, and suspecting them, that *Baruck sets them on*.

2. Believe that they love you. It is hard to periwade sinners who love their sin, to think that any can love their persons. that set themselves against their corruptions: *Ahab hates Micaiah, because he never speaks good of him*; and therefore thinks that he hates him: ask yourselves; if they did not love you, would they be so foolish as to expose themselves,

selves, to your anger, that they may do you good? did they not love you, would they set themselves so earnestly to implore God for you, and seek your preservation? They hate your sins indeed, because they know that they will undo you, if not forsaken: but they love your Souls, and therefore seek their Salvation. If they did not love you, they would not willingly stand between an angry God, and angry sinners. Would you but solemnly think what it is for that they are treating so seriously with you, you would be persuaded of this, that they are unweariedly bent to seek your salvation; and if this be not love, what is.

3. Think then that it is your interest to hearken to them. It fares with Gods Ministers as it did with *Joshuah, Israel fly before their enemies; Joshuah falls upon his face and prays;* and God saith to him, what makest thou here? *up, Israel hath sinned,* Thus Gods servants see the owner of the vineyard angry, and hear him speak of cutting down such a fig-tree, they beg of him to spare it a little, not to be so angry; and God saith to them, go see if such an one will be reformed, amended, and bear fruit, else I will certainly Cut him down. For this reason therefore they come unto you: and for this end they set themselves to convince, reprove, warn, counsel, entreat, you.

you. And let it be a Solemn word to urge this advice upon you, to consider that if they cannot after all prevail with you to entertain their Counsels, they will not be long able to hold Gods hands; but he will say to them, pray no more for that sinner. It may be this year also he may wait, but if still you continue as you were, what shall become of you next, the Lord knows, *But if you, bear your Souls shall live.*

Sermon



SERMON XIII

2. **I** proceed to the consideration of the reason of the *Vine-Dressers* request; under which he obligeth himself to his farther and more endeavours with it for its help to bear; *till I shall dig about it, and dung it.* The two expressions here used, do signifie two known pieces of Husbandry that are wont to be employed about trees, to make them to bear: They that are skilful Gardeners, when they see a tree to fail in point of fruitfulness, are wont to dig about the Roots, and lay them bare for a while, and afterwards to apply dung to them, and to cover them again, as a proper expedient to attain their end by; and these Metaphors do signifie the improvement of all suitable and proper means with sinners, to bring them to Repentance, and new Obedience: Not that Gods Servants have not been doing of this before, for men
are

are not to be judged truly faithful, that neglect to urge and press the Truths of the Word upon Sinners, and endeavour to prevail with them to come unto God, and believe in Christ: but it intimates that they will persist in it; and that this consideration quickens them to more earnestness, and diligence in it; and it may also design a more particular and personal application unto such: and herein we are made to understand,

1. What is the efficacy of the discovery of Gods Anger ready to fall upon sinners in the heart of his Servants, *viz.* to route them up to a more earnest pursuit of their work, and for that end, to desire a farther respite to be given.

2. What is the reason why God is pleased to stop the execution of his threatnings after he hath denounced them, *viz.* that sinners may have more endeavours, and more sedulous, used with them for their Conversion; Hence,

DOCTRINE.

Gods Servants request, and be sometimes mercifully grants a reprieve to barren Professors, after solemn threatnings; that they may have farther means used with them to render them fruitful.

It is true, there is only the intercession it self expressed in the parable, but our Saviours design is to intimate, both that there was such a delay granted, and how it was obtained, and what was the motive for the one to ask, and the other to grant ; and it is determined in this. There are two things whereof a distinct account may be here enquired after ?

1. What influence this reason hath into the desires of Gods servants, to make them so earnest for a year longer ?

2. On what account this argument & plea of theirs prevails with God ?

1. What influence this reason hath into the desires of Gods servants, to make them so earnest for a year longer ?

A. It is certain that desires have their motives, and rational desires are moved rationally. Now when Christs Messengers see the eminent danger that is over the heads of sinners, and the ax of Divine vengeance ready to cut them down ; as humane pity cannot but stir in them the bowels of compassion ; so there is not a little in this consideration to raise these desires in them to greater measures of ardency : and that in a double respect, viz. both with respect to themselves, and referring to those for whom these desires are :

1. In regard of themselves. There is a self-

Self-interest which Gods Ministers have in this affair, which stimulates these desires in them; and we may take a brief distinct account of it in these things.

1. They are sensible of the awful charge of souls lying upon them, and the solemn account they must be called unto for them. There is no man that is duly qualified for the work of Christ in the Gospel, who hath not his heart affected with the frequent consideration of this; who doth not often think with himself, God hath put these souls under my watch, and made it my duty to give them faithful warning from him, of their misery and danger, and the duty which is required of them; and hath enjoined me to be *instant* with them, *in season, and out of season*: to observe their state, and case, and accommodate counsels to them accordingly, and to be very earnest with them for their good; to deal with them plainly, and to withhold no necessary and seasonable Truth from them. They often ponder on that as spoken to them, *Ezek. 3. 17; 18. Son of man, I have set thee a watchman to the House of Israel, &c.* and think with themselves, I must appear ere long before the dreadful Tribunal of the great Judge, and then Jesus Christ will ask of me, what is become of those souls whom I so solemnly enjoined thee to look after? where are those *Sheep* and

and *Lambs* whom I gave thee a charge to feed for me.

2. They are also in some measure acquainted with their own sinful infirmities and Temptations. God is pleased to manage his treaty with sinners about the things which concern their peace, by men of like *infirmities* with themselves; and he is wont to make such as he sends upon this errand to apprehend it deeply: which apprehension hath been wont to make them many times too backward in accepting the Commission, as judging themselves *insufficient* for so weighty an undertaking, and therefore we have that of *Moses*, *Exod. 4. 13.* *Oh my Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of him whom thou wilt send: q.d. any rather than me;* and of *Isaiah*, chap. 6. 5. *I am a man of unclean lips;* of *Jeremiah*, chap. 1. 5. *I cannot speak, for I am a child;* of *Paul*, 2 Cor 2. 16. *who is sufficient for these things?* they feel so much of a dead and insensible frame in themselves, so much want of a tender and compassinioate pity for souls, so many discouragements ready to prevail over them, to make them omit their duty, or be deficient in it, which renders them apt to be jealous of themselves, and suspicious least they should give God just provocation against them,

3. Hence when they see Gods Judgments threatening of sinners to cut them down, they reflect upon themselves and are afraid. Tho,

as to their integrity, and sincere desire to be faithful, and endeavour after it ; they have the *witness* of their *consciences* ; yet they suspect their *deceitful hearts* ; and now bethink themselves whether they have done all that they might , and had the opportunity of doing, to have prevented this : have they chosen suitable and seasonable subjects to insist upon ? have they been distinct and particular enough in their applying of them ? have they spoken plain and full ? have they been earnest in it ? and that both in their publick Preaching, and private advice, as there hath been opportunity ? and are now ready to think, If I had been more earnest and importunate, more solemn and serious, more zealous and affectionate, such a sinner might possibly have been perswaded.

4. This fear puts them upon the resolution to be more intently engaged in this, if God shall give them a farther opportunity. Fear of Gods displeasure at them, makes them to renew their purposes, and so it quickens them in their work. This was it that made *Paul* to study the art of *persuasion*, to think that he as well as they to whom he Preached, *must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ*, &c. 2 Cor. 5. 10, 11. they therefore draw up this resolve in themselves, that if God shall afford them more liberty to treat with such, they will be more so-

learn with them, tell them more plainly of their sins, and of Gods Judgments; plead harder, and entreat with more tenderness and compassion than ever: and all this to discharge the obligation lying on them, and satisfy their own consciences, and so provide for their more comfortable appearing before their Judge.

5. Hence, that they may have farther opportunity, they importunately beg for the sinners reprieve. They know that if he be now cut down, he will be put wholly beyond their farther care and charge; they can then no more pray for him, nor plead with him; and if they have not done all their duty to them, it will then be too late to endeavour it: so that their request is mainly built upon this plea, let him live, raise him up this once from death, spare him a while longer, give him a farther day, that so I may use more and more industrious endeavours with him before he goes hence, than ever I have done.

2. With respect to them for whom these desires are; viz. the sinners whom they see upon the brink of ruin. As it is their love to them that makes them to ask a year more for them, so a principal motive; is, that they may try farther with them, and there are these things that come into this consideration.

1. They know that sinners are converted and made fruitful by the use of means. That this is the ordinary way in the which God is wont

to dispense his grace to the souls of men : when therefore God intends to have a people to his praise, he plants them into a vineyard ; he sends the Gospel to them, and affords them his Ordinances. If God hath much people in Corinth, Paul must tarry and preach there ; for the gathering of them in : if therefore those that have so long been unprofitable, be at last made to serve God, they must be continued under the Ordinances : if the fig-tree ever comes to bear fruit, it must be let grow in the Vineyard, and be there manured.

2. They also know that God is wont to give a blessing to his Servants industry in the use of means. Though all success depends absolutely upon God, and we cannot by all our care and endeavours bring home one soul to Jesus Christ ; yet because God hath appointed the Gospel to be the instrument of Conversion and salvation ; and hath required his Servants to use diligence and constancy in the dispensation of it unto men, he is therefore wont to encourage their industry, by giving good success unto it ; not but that he useth his Sovereignty here, but he frequently doth so : Paul, who laboured more than all the Apostles, won more Souls unto Christ than any of them : Diligence must needs be nearest to success.

3. Hence the Sinners danger, moving their compassion, engageth them to be more industrious with them. When they see unregenerate

state men, by neglecting a day of grace, to have provoked God to just anger, and that anger to discover it self in the tokens of his righteous severity, their hearts are thereupon stirred in them, and they commiserate their dolefully dangerous condition, and that puts them to study what is their duty in this case, to prevent it : and because all that is in their power to do, is to be more earnest and instant in labouring with them for their good; now they shake off all their indispositions, and give themselves up to their work; they say, *if I will not have this sinner to perish, I must pluck him as a brand out of the fire, I must cry aloud, and not spare him, but shew him his transgression, and plead harder than ever with him.*

4. Hence they are not willing to despair but hope still concerning them. Despair of doing good, is that which enervates the spirits, and puts a damp upon all activity, yea makes men to cast off all endeavours : whereas on the other hand, hope oyls the wheels, warms the heart and gives activity to compassion : they are not therefore willing to think that sinners are hopeless : though they have been careless and obstinate, yet it is possible that *God may give them repentance, and they may come in at last : their hard heart may be softened, they may be brought to see the evil of their doings, and made to mourn* for

for and turn from them; God can change them and means may be blessed unto them for good; they are not out of the reach of Almighty power to convert and save them.

5. This therefore makes them beg time for farther trial. They do it not with any design to aggravate the sinners guilt, though it unhappily proves so too often in the event; they would not make any mans miseries more and greater, if they could help it, but all they do in this regard, is in hope that it may be their Salvation; it is because they are not willing that these should perish: and because all their hope is in a farther probation, which only will allow unto them the opportunity of using means for their good, or unto sinners the opportunity for repentance: They do therefore seek unto God that he would grant this their request, and for that reason the vinedresser asks but one year more because it is meerly for probation that he desires it.

2. Upon what account this argument and plea of theirs prevails with God to let sinners alone a little longer?

A. We are not to suppose that mens pleadings, can alter Divine Purposes. Or make God to take up other resolutions concerning any than he hath from eternity determined in himself. But this is to be well remarked that God puts this into the hearts of his ser-
vants

vants and he puts these arguments into their mouths, and suffers these pleadings to prevail with him to answer their requests ; and he hath holy designs in all this. Now the reasons why God is willing to forbear, that he may so give his servants farther opportunity to take pains with sinners, after they have continued barren under so many means, and so much patience as hath been already afforded them, are such as these.

1. He doth it to give his Ministers the opportunity to discharge their Consciences, towards such Sinners : that so, *whether these will hear or forbear they may save their own souls* ; and may have peace in themselves, in that they have done their duty to the utmost of their power. By this means their *favour* comes to be more *sweet unto God*, whether these be *saved or perish*. It is true, Gods Ministers need pardon of all their defects every day ; and if God *should be strict*, they could *not stand* : But as it cannot but be their great grief to think, these and those sinners are gone, and we have not discharged our duty to them : so, on the other hand, it will afford them great inward peace, though they cannot infallibly determine, what effect it hath wrought on them for their eternal good, yet that they have been faithful, and done their utmost as instruments in this affair. We see how chearfully Paul can take
his

his last leave of his *Ephesians* on this account, when he can say, *Act. 20. 26, 27. I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God; and God would have the souls of his faithful servants comforted in their work.*

2. God sometimes intends that some sinners shall be new-born out of time. There are some of Gods Elect, that are by his holy pleasure suffered to stand for a long while in his vineyard, and to grow worse and worse under and by all the pains and cost that have been expended upon them : yea to run up to such an height of wickedness, as to provoke him to break in upon them with his Judgments, and to threaten them with destruction ; and when he hath laid them up in the irons of affliction, he then bores their ears to instruction ; and so he brings them in at the last to be made the eternal monuments of his glorious Grace, and to shew his mighty power, by making them astonishing instances of his praise. Such an one was *Manassch*, and *Paul* tells us that he was such an one too, *born out of time* ; when therefore it is so, and such are ready to perish, he is pleased, together with putting it into the hearts of his Servants to importune him, also to let them live yet longer, that there may be an opportunity to instruct and help them to Salvation : and herein also he mightily

tily honours his Servants, by giving them the lives of such at their request.

3. And God sometimes doth it to make his wrath the more illustrious upon them at last in their destruction. It is an awful expression of the Apostle, Rom. 9. 22. What if God willing to shew his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction. Sinners have provoked God to destroy them; such as have enjoyed Vineyard-privileges, even all the means of Grace, and despised them, have greatly added to this provocation: and now, what if God sees meet to let them alone, after they have greatly incensed his anger against them, that they may fill up an extraordinary measure, and thereby be made the more eminent and singular instances of his wrath in the day of his vengeance! who shall lay any thing to his charge? and though the desires of his Servants have another designed aim than this, yet if he sees meet to suffer their sincere endeavours, and more than ordinary labour which they are at with such, to turn to their more fearful account; herein he is no loser, nor shall his Messengers lose their reward.

U S E. I.

This Doctrine affords us a rule of probable conjecture, what God will do with a pro-
fessing

testing people, when his Judgements are upon them for their barrenness. Whether he be like to proceed in a way of anger or to suspend his wrath. All serious souls are thoughtful at such a time, what God intends to do, and would be very glad if he would shew them a token for Good; It is true, the best and most desirable token is, when his Judgements work them up to an universal repentance and reformation: that saith that God will certainly return to them, and *do them good*: but mean while, it is no contemptible presage that God will yet spare, and delay to execute *all his wrath* on such a people if he produce these two things in his servants.

1. If he makes them earnest and importunate with him to spare his people. When God had given that advice, *Joel. 2. 17.* Wee have that animadversion, made upon it, *verse 18. then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people.* Where there is a reall praying ministry in a place, though God may afflict, And sorely chasten such a People, for their provocations, yet there is great hope that he will not lay them waste: he must call these off, and stop their mouths before he can do that work, these, like *Jacob*, have power with God, and their fervent prayers of faith, with which they do importunately & unweariedly follow him to hold his

hands ; especially when that is in conjunction.

2. That he quickens them to be more solemn in their work, when they are much enlivened in their Ministry which he hath committed to them ; when they do imitate Christs Mediation in both parts of it, they pray hard to God to pardon and heal his people, and they as earnestly warn and entreat sinners to repent : this speaks as if God were resolved to renew the treaty with his people, and for that reason, spirits his servants rightly for the duty incumbent on them in the management of it. Let all then that fear God, and tremble at his Judgments, pray hard to him, that he would thus pour out of his spirit upon his Ambassadors, in this the day of his fore Controversy with us : that when there are so many indications of his anger and dark clouds impending over us, in respect to the whole state of our affairs, there may be this dawn of the *light of Gods countenance* upon us, to encourage us to hope and believe that he will not thus *leave us nor forsake us.*

U S E II.

This tells us that all the time that is afforded to a sinner, after some eminent deliverance is bestowed upon him, is probation time. It is an opportunity given him on ye-

by purpose, to see if he will yet at last improve the day of grace, and return to God. Such deliverances are not evidences that God is reconciled to them, and that their state is now good, because God hath heard prayers for them, and hath spared them from just now going to the pit: no, but they in their distress made promises, that if God would restore them, and give them a little more time, they would not live as before they had done: if they might have their life given them: and a few more Sabbaths and Ordinances allowed them, they would husband them better; and they who prayed with them, promised that they *would dig about them, and dung them*; this is the ground on which they were restored, and now they live upon trial, whether they will do so or no: and there are three things wherein this probation is to be taken notice of.

1. It gives them a new opportunity to return to God, and live to his praise. It affords them not only farther time, but also a renewed season; it suffers them to stand still in the vineyard; it stops the ax of revenge from cutting them down; it gives them leave to go to Gods House, and there to hear his Word, and to be called upon, counselled and warned to repent; it lengthens out *the day of their visitations*, and holds the *things of their years* still before them: *now, all the opportunities*

unities of grace which are bestowed upon men, are properly trials which God useth with them; for he will have his own glory by them in the conclusion.

2. Nay the very reason upon which God gives them more time, is to see if they will do better now than they did before. It is upon a supposition that it will repent them after such dangers and deliverances, of their former neglects and that they will be thereby quickened to husband such an opportunity better; God saith, surely such a sinner, whom I have brought from the gates of the grave, who hath been restored to a new life, and that when he was almost beyond hope, will lead a new life; *he will surely receive instruction*, and hearken to the calls of the Gospel, surely he will not after this forget God, and return again to his old vain and sinful courses.

3. Hence if this be neglected, the time is like to be short, The parable mentions but a year; and probations after provocations are not wont to be long: when Judgment is begun, God is in haste. To shew his pity, and how loth he is *that sinners should perish*, he will still bear a little longer: but, to shew his Holiness, he will not tarry long if the end be not answered. And there is great reason why God should now use speed, because if such eminent deliverances

of

of his will not work on their hearts, but they out-grow, and get them over, there is little expectation that they should after that get any good by forbearance; for by this carriage of theirs they are the more desperately hardned in their sins.

U S E. III.

For Exhortation to sinners; such as have had more observable sparing mercies afforded unto them: you have been brought low by your iniquity; God hath laid his hand heavy upon you; you were under a sentence of death in your own apprehension, and the terrors of it made you afraid; you then reflected, and remembred how unprofitably you had lived, & how wofully you had despised all the means of Grace: then you earnestly called for prayers, and made a great many solemn promises; and God hath heard prayers for you, and granted you the desire of your souls and you are now escaped, and returned to his house again. Let the truth in hand urge these three lessons upon you, and put them in practice.

1. Beware of turning to your former courses again. It was our Saviours advice to one whom he had healed, Joh. 5. 14. Behold, thou art made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing

befall

besal thee. If you find any temptation so to do, check your selves with this thought, certainly God did not deliver me for this; this will be an ill requital of the Lord for this great benefit to me; and know it, that if you do return to your vomit, after such afflictions, it had been better for you, if you had died under such a stroke of Gods hand, and been then sent down to the pit: little do you know what an aggravation this will be to your guilt.

2. Be sure therefore now hearken to the solemn and earnest strivings with you in the Ordinances. Think when you come to the House of God again, what a mercy it is that when you were going to silence, God said return and live: now remember what it was for, viz. that you might have these means given you to invite you to Repentance, that are not afforded to them in the grave: If then he directs his Messengers to plead hard with you, and to lay your condition open before you, hearken as for your lives, for indeed it is your life; bless God that you have such another price in your hands, and be afraid of living unconverted one Sabbath more, lest your hearts should grow harder again: and therefore,

3. Tremble so much as to think, that the next Judgment should come, and find you barren still. Remember, though you have escaped one, yet you are not secure; God hath

hath more ways, and more Judgments to fall upon sinners by ; beware of security : It is good to be often thinking, that as you are in Gods hand, so if you should by abusing this mercy of his, and living impenitent after it, stir up his indignation, and bring another visitation upon you, what little reason there will be, that you should expect another deliverance ; what credit would God give to your promises, who have already so broken them with him ? what aggravated provocation will be thus offered to him, to forbear no more ? and what matter of horror and despair will it supply your minds withal, to think that such mercies, and such endeavours have been so lamentably despised by you.

See more



SERMON XIV

verse IX. *And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

9. **I**T follows that we proceed to consider of the issue that the Vine-Dresser comes to with his Lord about this Fig-tree: He desires but one year more to make some farther experiment upon it; and what then? why here is a double Hypothesis or Supposition that he makes about it, viz. either it will after this bear fruit, or else it will still remain barren; and upon each of these supposals he raiseth a rational inference or conclusion. We may in the first place take the *Hypotheses* themselves into consideration. The Vine-dresser dares not to promise any thing positively, concerning the fig-tree; being uncertain what will be the return of all his labour and pains; the farthest that he can say, is, it is possible.

possible it may bear, and possibly it may not; however, if his Lord be but willing to try, he is willing to lay out his labour upon it.

Hence,

DOCTRINE.

All the endeavours which are used by men for the rendering of Sinners fruitful, are uncertain as to the issue.

They that use them have no assurance that they shall obtain; they are not certain that sinners shall be converted, and made serviceable to the glory of God: they know not but that after all is done, they will remain as they were, as far from grace and holiness as ever. In prosecution of this Doctrine we may,

1. Enquire upon what grounds the evidence of this Truth is built, and

2. Resolve a doubt which is apt to be raised on this consideration.

1. In the enquiry into the grounds of the evidence of this Truth, we may take up with these conclusions.

1. That God knows who are appointed to obtain grace and salvation. We are not therefore to charge this uncertainty upon him, though men be at a loss, yet he is at

none.

None : this the Apostle vindicates, *2 Tim. 2^d 19.* *The Lord knows who are his.* He not only knows them in the gross, or number ; but who they are personally and individually ; not only how many they are, but what are their names, and in particular : *he is a chosen vessel,* Acts 9. 15. and this must needs be, because his free Election is the first link in the Chain, whereof eternal glory is the last, *Rom. 8. 29, 30.* when therefore it was a time of the greatest obduration upon the Nation of the Jews, *Paul* satisfies himself in this, *Rom. 11. 7.* *The Election hath obtained it ;* so that in this respect, here is the greatest certainty that can be, because Gods purposes are Unchangeable.

2. That the means of grace are nextly and directly appointed for the benefit of these. It was for the Redemption and Salvation of Sinners, that Jesus Christ came into the World ; but for which he had never engaged in the work which he undertook : and to that end that his redeemed may be brought to participate in the good which he hath procured for them, the Gospel is promulgated, and the offers and invitations to accept of peace are made to sinners : and this is the reason why the Gospel is sent to this place, and not to that, because God hath some of his chosen ones here, whom he hath loved with an everlasting love, and whom he designs

S 2

to call by these means, into the grace where by they may be saved : nor can it be said that ever the Gospel was sent unto such a place, where there were none of that number dwelling ; though possibly there have bin more of them in some places than in others : it is therefore called *the Gospel of Salvation*.

3. Hence all these wheresoever they are, shall sooner or later be brought in by the means of Grace. There is no uncertainty in the thing it self as to the futurity of it ; that shall be a truth in the winding up, *Acts. 13. 43, As many as were ordained to Eternal Life, believed* ; these may possibly lie a great while in their sins, and abide barren under manifold essays used with them, there may be a great deal of time and cost for the present lost upon them ; they may out-stand the three years of Patience, and fall into the one year of probation, before they bear any fruit ; but it is certain they shall turn to God before they dy, they shall not be cut down for their barrenness ; they shall be born to God, though it be out of time.

4. But the Gospel means are sent to more than are chosen. Our Saviour more than once useth that assertion, *many are called, but few are chosen*, by which he doth not intend effectual vocation, for that belongs to none but the few who are chosen, but the outward calling of the Gospel, by which men are brought

brought into the visible Church, and are invited to come unto Christ, believing on him, to seek grace from him, whereby they may be enabled to serve him, it is therefore such a call as men refuse to close cordially withal. Those whom God hath set his love upon, are, before their conversion, among the rest of the world, they are alike as to their natural state; and those unto whom the dispensation of the Gospel is committed, do not know how to distinguish these from others, and are therefore enjoined to come unto such a people, and make offers of grace universally to all that hear them, *Isa. 55. 1. Ho! every one that thirsteth come, Rev. 22. 17. whosoever will, let him take the waters of life freely*; and Christ is by them as much offered to one as to another, and they are as seriously and solemnly invited to come in unto him; and accept of his grace; and if they refuse to entertain these offers, they will be inexcusable, and their guilt will be aggravated, *Joh. 15. 24.*

5. We cannot know antecedently to conversion who are chosen, *i. e.* by any ordinary notes or signs. God did sometimes immediately reveal this to his Extraordinary Ambassadors of old, although not always: but there are no rules given us, by which we may conclude positively that such are Elect, and thereby encourage our selves particularly to use endeavours with them that they

they may be called ; there being no Scripture Rules on which we can proceed : and therefore such a Faith hath no foundation. There is nothing in their good natures ; for God sometimes chuseth the most rugged dispositions, when he passeth by the most ingenious ; that young man, *Mat. 19.* bad fair, but he fell short : not by any impulse on our spirits, making us to be more earnest and solicitous for them than others ; for God may thus encourage endeavours in us, to make them thereby become the more inexcusable.

6. *Men cannot convert whom they please. The new birth depends not on the wills of men Joh. 1. 13.* Our good will may animate us to our duty and because our love to them makes us very loth that they should perish, it will excite industry in us ; and Gods end is thus accomplished by us ; but our Grace cannot infuse it, though wee have never so much of it in us. What Godly Parent would lose one of his Children ? What Godly Minister would lose any of his Flock ? What Godly Christian would see any one of his neighbours perish if this could be ? If it could be in his power to bring them home to Christ there should none of them ly out from him. Mens work is, in their place to endeavour this, but the efficacy of it depends upon an higher vertue ; 1. Cor. 3. 6: I have planted, Apollos hath watered, but God gave the encrease.

7. As none but God can bless the means with

with success, so he doth his pleasure in it : Christ, speaking of Regeneration, tells us, *Joh. 3. 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit of God: As it is of grace, so that it may appear to be so. God takes and leaves as he sees meet, Rom. 8. 18. He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy.* All the labours of his people are under the Sovereign Dispose of his hand ; they may throw out the Net, but it is he who must bring the fish into it, if they take any, or else they may toil all night and catch none : nor is he obliged to do it, he is neither obliged to sinners to convert them, for it is *by grace that any are saved* ; nor is he engaged to such as seek and endeavour it, for he can recompense their labour fully in another way, if he please to frustrate it in the thing it self.

8. There are none that know whether God will give his blessing to, or with-hold it from their utmost endeavours. If he do afford it, their labour shall be succeeded, if he restrain it sinners will remain impenitent under all. This God hath kept as a secret with himself ; and therefore all our endeavours must needs be under uncertainties, and the issue must be dubious to us. Doubtless God hath holy ends in keeping his Servants in suspense ; however, they are to do their work, without any demurr. Ezekiel must deliver his Message,

page, whether the people will *hear or forbear*?

2. Here is a doubt which calls for some resolution, *viz.* Is it not matter of great discouragement on the spirits of Godly men to labour under such uncertainties, or what is it that should animate them to their work.

A. Flesh and Blood may possibly take discouragement at it, and be ready to think, what shall I lose all my labour, and possibly, instead of bringing men to Christ, and Salvation, make them worse, and encrease their condemnation? but Grace will teach us other lessons. Here then let these few things be considered for our satisfaction in this point.

1. That there is all reason that God should have the sovereign disposal of his own gifts. That he be acknowledged to be supream, and arbitrary in his dispensing of himself to the children of men, must needs be his indisputable prerogative, who shall find fault with him *for doing with his own what he will?* if he should have left all the whole race of mankind in their natural estate, and bestowed his grace upon none of them, there would have been no ground for any to find fault with him, or lay any injurious dealing to his charge; for all were forfeited, and fallen into his hands, and lyable to his revenge; if then he will give his special favours to some

and

and not to others, and that according to his own pleasure, without acquainting us with the reason of it, it concerns not us to dispute, or make any demurr in our thoughts about it : the highest reason, and ultimate resolution of these things, which ought to set us down satisfied, is, *what if God will, Rom. 9. 22.*

2, That every Christian is under an indispensable duty in his place, to endeavour all that he can to promote the salvation of others. Ministers in their place, Parents in their place, Governours in theirs, and neighbours in theirs : this is a general duty that influenceth every relation that men bear ; according to the different manner in which it is to be attended : and this is enough to lay men under strong engagements to endeavour it to the utmost ; considering that otherwise they will bring themselves under guilt, and will not be able to answer it unto God, when he shall call them to an account about it. For men to take any discouragement in a known duty, is to hearken to Satans temptation, and to provoke God to anger against them. Though success be a great encouragement in duty, yet that which firstly ought to engage the conscience of one that fears God, is that it is his will. Duty is our part, success is his, we may desire it, and ought to pray for it ; but when we have done

Done all, we must leave it with him, Ezek.
3. 11.

3. That this uncertainty carries motive in it to do duty to all. As we do not know that we shall prevail with them, when we have done all; but that they may continue in their impenitency; so on the other hand, we do not know but that we may be instrumental of doing them good, that which carnal reason takes discouragement from, that grace encourageth it self by. I am sure it is an argument which the spirit of God makes use of to animate us to this constancy, Eccl. 11. 6. If we did certainly know that such an one would grow worse by all, and at last perish after he had used utmost endeavours with him for his salvation, this would make us to despair, and that would quite dishearten us from doing our duty; but as long as we know not what the event shall be, we now fetch our encouragement to obey Gods Precept from the precept it self under which we are, and so commit it to the Providence of God with humble submission; as becomes us.

4. There is a great deal of Hope notwithstanding this uncertainty. Hope is the spring of action; it is that which thrusts men forward into all their business. Thus it is done in the world, and in the management of all the affairs of this life, men go upon it. The Husbandman sows in hope; the Merchant adventures his Estate to manifold perils in hope; there is no assurance in these things; all that they can say, is, if God wills

Wills it shall prosper; and they ~~will~~ observe that this is the way in which the Providence of God is to be served, and unto which he is wont ordinarily to give his blessing. Now there is as good hope here: God is pleased to convert sinners by the use of means; it is the way that he hath appointed for it, it is not therefore impossible but that he may give his blessing to our endeavours, and make them to succeed; nay, it is very probable, that if he makes us diligent and earnest, he doth intend to give us the desired success: the Word of God gives us as much encouragement to this, as to any thing else, and more too.

5. That if these endeavours do succeed, we are well paid for all our labour. The joy and comfort of it, will give us abundant satisfaction. If we may but save a Soul from going to the pit, if we may but win a sinner over unto Christ, and be instrumental of bringing him in unto him, that he may have service from him we shall never think much of any thing that we have done for the obtaining of it: All these *travailing pains* are now forgotten, for the joy that there is one born to Christ, who shall serve him here, and live with him for ever. If the honour of God be very dear, and the Souls of sinners very precious to us, this will be our joy, and our triumph both now, and in the day of Christ; and the very hopes and forethoughts of

of it are enough to put life into our endeavours.

6. But supposing that we should fail in our desires and hopes on this account, we shall be no losers still. *Our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* It will indeed be our present grief and bitterness of heart, but we shall not lose our recompense. The rewards which God bestows upon his people, are not according to the success, but according to their integrity and faithful industry. If we pray for the conversion of these or those, & they be not converted, *Our prayers shall return into our own bosoms*, if we take pains with them and all comes to nothing as to them, but seems to be as water spilt on the ground, yet God will not forget our labour of love, but will remember us in the day of Recompense : with this Christ comforts himself, *Isa. 49.*

4.

U S E. I.

This may serve to caution us against carnal confidence on the one hand, and despair on the other. This caution concerns all these whose business it is to endeavour the conversion of sinners unto God; these are two dangerous rocks that we must carefully steer between

tween if we would keep a right course in this duty.

1. Beware of carnal confidence. Let us not make too large and positive promises to ourselves, with respect of our labour: let us not say and conclude, that because we find our hearts to be mightily carried out for the good of them whom we have to do withal, so as to make us unweariedly industrious with them, and to use all manner of endeavours that we are capable of; that therefore they must needs be converted, as if by our own grace or industry we were able to do it in and for them; or as if by our care we had obliged God to a necessity of doing it for us, upon our laying ourselves out; this is a carnal conclusion, and it flows from ignorance, and pride, and presumption, and it thereupon offers unto God no little provocation, to withdraw his blessing, and so to disappoint our expectation lest otherwise we should be lifted up with self-applause, and *burn incense to our own net*, and so rob him of the honour of his work.

2. And let us avoid despair of doing good, what-ever seeming discouragements there may be before us, what though a great deal of the pains which we have taken seems to be lost, and sinners are as far from being fruitful as ever; nay, they grow worse, and more rooted in their wicked courses; what though

though we have tried all the ways that we can think of with them, and all seems to do them no good, but rather hurt; yet let not this make us to cast off our endeavours, to despond, and to say it is in vain for us to do any thing more, but let us say as *Peter* did to *Christ*, *Luk. 5. 5. we have toiled all the night and taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.* We cannot be certain that the time is past, or that this sinner may not be still turned unto God; he can do it, and for ought we know he will do it: it may be at the next throwing out the fish will come into the net, and be taken.

U S E. II.

This Doctrine tells us that it is no good Rule to judge of mens fidelity by their success. It is a thing which is too much practised among men; but the truth in hand will convince us how not only uncharitable, but also how ungrounded a conclusion it is, for, if men are but instruments in Gods hand, and used by him at his meer pleasure, to do what work he sees meet to do by them, and have no certainty of the efficacy of their endeavours; then, for others to say, that because there is not such fruit of their labours as

were

were to be desired, therefore they believe not at all or are not industrious, or sincere in what they do, is a very censorious inference; that, because such a Minister brings home more souls to Christ, than such another doth, therefore this man is not so faithful or so painful as he: because this parent hath towardly & hopeful Children, & that other hath such as are rebellious, and Scandalous, therefore he is careless and negligent of them, is a conclusion which the premises will not prove. It is indeed a duty for every man to examine himself; and such events have great motive in them, to put them upon it, the more Solemnly to enquire, if such a Providence be not a punishment of such a neglect, and if they discover it, to bewail and reform it; but that is, must needs be so, is contrary to the evidence of the Doctrine, and a placing of too much upon men.

U S E III.

This truth also affords us a word of warning, to beware of negligence and boasting. Both of these we are too prone to, and either of them will certainly do us damage.

1. Take heed of negligence. How many are there who indulge in themselves sloth and neglect of duty, by this very argument,

viz. that all the pains that men can take will do nothing, except God hath appointed such an one to salvation; and if he hath, then he will bring him home to himself, whether I take pains with him or no: thus are we apt to abuse the Decrees of God for the indulgence of our our own sinfulness and sloth. Nay the inference it self which is thus drawn, is false; and savours of ignorance; for God who hath appointed the end, hath determined the means too; and it is according to Scripture to say, if this had not been that had not fallen out: yea, it is awful to consider, that sometimes God appoints our neglect to be the occasion of their perdition, when we do so neglect, what saith the Scripture? 1 Sam. 3. 13. *I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not;* and when it is thus, our sin is nothing the less, yea, we become Accessaries. God had appointed the sinner to perish; and yet see what God saith to the Prophet, Ezek. 3. 18. *He shall die in his sins, but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

2. Take heed of boasting yourselves. If God shall succeed your painful endeavours, and make you instrumental of the saving good of those that are under your charge. Beware of being lifted up in your minds and arrogating it to your selves: but let it on

the other hand humble you, and lead you to admire the rich mercy of God to you: and therefore, if you see others as painful as you, not so successful, do not insult over them, or prefer your selves before them: remember all these things are under uncertainties, and are the arbitrary dispensations of Gods Providence, who blesteth when and as he sees meet. Give God the Glory then, and say with *Paul*, *I am nothing*. Know it, that if your hearts begin to be puffed up, *as if by your own vertue you had done this*; he can soon put a blast upon your labours, and teach you by sad experience, that it is not your *rising early and sitting up late* that can accomplish any thing without him.

U S E IV.

This may also teach us to have a care of placing too much upon men. It is true, all the gifts, and graces, and industry, which one hath and useth more than another, is of God, and he is to be acknowledged in it: but when they are best furnished for their work, and most faithful in the discharge of it, they are men still: they are but instruments in the hand of God, and *Paul* useth this as an argument to discover the vanity of his *Corinthians* by, in saying, *I am of Paul*, &c. 1 Cor.

3. 5. *who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but Ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man.* It follows not that because such a Minister is able, pious and painful, that therefore he must needs convert more unto God than another that is not so furnished as he is; that because we have Parents that are Godly, and are very diligent in doing their duty for us and to us, that we must of necessity be saved: If God hath placed us under such, we have a great deal of reason to bless him for it, *for every good and perfect giving is from him:* but know it, that they may do all that lies in their power, and yet you may get no good by them; and if you confide in this, it is the way to get none.

U S E.

Let it be to exhort every Christian in his place, to do his duty, and so commend it to God. I do not say but that it is good and profitable for us, yea and we ought also to do it, to observe what success our labours do find, that we may either take encouragement by the blessing of God upon them, to be the more chearful in our work, and that God may have the praise from us: or to be quickned and awakened by the unsuccessfulness of them to more diligence: But

But if we have no certainty here, then it calls upon us to do these two things in conjunction.

1. To be faithful in doing what God requires of us. This is our province; we then know our place, and acknowledge it, when we take the command to be our obligation, and do what we do in Obedience thereunto: when we remember that we are Gods Servants, and that it is his work which we are employed in, and he will look after it, and carry on his own ends, in and by it: *the love of God must constrain us* in these things as it did Paul, 2 Cor. 5. 14. It is for us to say, however God disposeth of things, my work is to be faithful, that I may have a clear conscience, and peace before his Tribunal.

2. To commend our labours unto God, and that, not only by a submitting of them to his Providence, without taking of his work out of his hands, which is one part of this duty; but also by earnest prayer to him, confessing that all our endeavours without him will do nothing; call upon him, and beg hard of him, that he will *confirm our work*, and *make our way prosperous*. If we are uncertain, and all depends upon him; it saith that we should pray over all that we do: pray before, that God would direct and assist us; pray after, that God would bless this Ser-

mon, that counſel, the other reproof for their good: we may elſe *ſpend and be ſpent*, and all we can do, turn to no account; but if we can prevail with God in their behalf, and he be pleaſed to ſend forth his ſpirit, and give a bleſſing to our endeavours, then ſhall they be fruitful, and we ſhall quickly ſee them, of unprofitable to become profitable.

S E R M O N



SERMON XV

IT follows that we consider the *Hypotheses* severally, together with the inferences which the Vine-dresser draws from them. The first thing that he supposeth is, That this fig-tree, after he hath digged about it and dunged it, may possibly bear, though it were before barren; and truly, if he had not had some hope of this, he would not have asked liberty to make any farther trial upon it: The inference which he draws from hence is not exprest in the Text, but intended: It is an *Ellyptick* kind of expression, and very frequent in Scripture Dialect; in which there is something left to be supplied: what that is here, is to be gathered from that which is concluded upon the latter *Hypothesis*, for contrary suppositions, infer contrary conclusions. Our Translation suitably supplies it with the word, [*well*] *g. d.* all shall be well; there will then be no occasion to cut it down,
but

but it will be profitable for it to stand; it will be both honourable and serviceable in the Vineyard; it will not repent thee of this forbearance; nor shall I be lorry for the pains that I shall have taken with it; and it shall be well with that too; the reproach of its barrenness shall cease, and it shall be out of the danger of the threatning.

Hence,

DOCTRINE.

*If after all patience and pains used with them,
Barren Souls become fruitful, all shall be well.*

Though they have been long in Gods Vineyard, under the dispensation of Gospel means, and enjoyed all manner of endeavours that have been used with them, have worn out the greatest part of a day of grace, and withstood thousands of calls and counsels, doing God no service all this while, but dishonouring him; have tumbled the ground, provoked God to anger against them, & stirred him up to proceed to threaten them with cutting down; if yet at the last it repents them, and they loath themselves for their sin, and return to him again with all their heart, and with all their soul, all shall still be well at the last.

There are three respects in which the Truth of the Doctrine doth discover it self;
the

the proposing and clearing of which will suffice for the Explication and Confirmation of it.

1. It shall be well with the sinner himself. Though he hath done so much to undo himself, and hath brought himself so near to the brink of Eternal Ruine, and had almost sinned himself beyond hope, yet this shall turn the scale, and recruit him again.

There are three things in which this may be discovered.

1. His former barrenness shall not be charged upon him. All the guilt of it shall be removed: it was a great height that he was arrived unto; he had been all this while heaping up provocation, and filling a terrible account: but upon his returning to God, all these scores are crest, and his person is justified; his sins are blotted out as a cloud, an act of oblivion is past, and his iniquities shall be remembered no more against him, Ezek. 18 21, 22.

2 God will repent him of the evil which he had threatened him withal. It is true, repentance cannot properly be in God, because it argues something rash, imprudent, inconsiderate in him that acts it, of which the infinitely wise God is incapable: but it is ascribed to him on the account of his providence. God sometimes threatens sinners, and in those threatnings, there is a reserve, in case of their repentance; and then, when
the

The sinner repents, God is said to repent, *viz.* when he revokes the threatening, and doth not put it in execution, hence that *Jer* 18. 8. the meaning of such language is, the sinner is now out of the danger of those judgments; he shall not dy, hence that advice *Zeph*, 2. *begin.* which intends not the eternal purpose of God, but the threatening of the law which was denounced against them.

3 Hence his estate is now safe. He is put into a state of life and salvation; *he is pass'd from death to life*; God is atoned to him, and loves him, and accepts of him: he shall abide in the vineyard as long as God sees meet to use him for his service there, and then he shall be transplanted into the Kingdom of Glory: he is numbred among the Children and entituled to the inheritance, he may now say as the Prophet *Isa.* 12. 1. *I will praise thee for thou wast angry with me, but thine anger is turned away.* Now the evidence of this comfortable truth will appear in these things.

1. The design of the whole day of grace, is to give sinners an opportunity to repent that they may be saved. That is it indeed that makes it a day of grace, because in it men have not only a space, but with it a call to return to God that they may live: it is to invite them to, and afford them the means for it; as long therefore as this day lasts,

lasts, God signifies hereby that he is reconcilable to sinners, that he *delights not in their death*, but had rather that they should turn and live: for which reason he calls upon them so to do: it is the *day of their visitation*, in which he holds out before them, *the things of their peace*, and therefore gives them offers that if they do accept of them, they shall have peace.

2. Hence the lengthening out of this day is on purpose to continue this opportunity to them; when sinners under the Gospel, though they neglect it, and hearken not to the voice of God in it, are yet spared, and the wrath of God doth not fall upon them in its weight, it is to afford them a farther trial; it is to see if it will at last repent them of their sins, and they will be perswaded to return unto God with all their hearts. Thus God interprets his patience exercised towards Jezebel her self, and chargeeth it upon her as an aggravation of her guilt, that she did not so improve it, Rev. 2. 22. when the sinner is cut off there is no more room for this, but whilst he is spared, there is a price continued in his hands.

3. Hence all the Evangelical Calls that are Ministerially given to the sinner, carry the encouraging promise in them. God stirs up the hearts of his Servants to offer mercy to sinners that have been careless, to invite and excite them to Repentance, and they are to make conditional promises to them, that if they

they do still repent and return, God is willing to receive them into his favour. They do not publish these terms of their own heads, but they do it by Commission; they are *Ambassadors*, and they have it in their *1st. 1. 10.* thus to do, *Jer. 3. 12, 13.* and the Word of God hath a great many of these, which look this way, and have no other limitations but to the present call, let it be when it will, *Jer. 3. 1, 2. Isa. 55. 7.* and that forecited, *Ezek. 18. 21, 22.* and the purpose of these is, to remove all doubts out of the minds of such as are ready to be discouraged.

4. The sinner is now brought under the promises which a faithful God cannot fail of performing. The Gospel promises are propounded unto men upon condition, if that be fulfilled in and by the man, God is under the obligation, his word is past for it; pardon, and peace, and glory are now the mans by Covenant: and whensoever any are made fruitful Christians, when they bring forth unto God according to his will, the condition is fulfilled in them; they are the men of and to whom God hath said that he will do them good. There must be faith and holiness put into the man, before he can hear spiritual fruits, and to them the blessing is assured; and God is as good as his word; it is impossible for him to ly: such a soul therefore must needs be in a safe state, if all the blessings that

that are laid up in the promise, and purchased by the Blood of Christ can make him so.

5. Nay this fruitfulness is a declaration of Gods everlasting love to him. It is an evidence that God hath chosen him in Christ before the foundation of the world. Electing love is the first grace, on which all the rest depend: the sinner cannot remove his own barrenness, or impower himself to serve God; if ever he be made fruitful, it is God who must do it in him: he only can take away that natural unprofitableness of his, and infuse the principle of a new life into him, the New-birth is the spirits work; the man is held under spiritual death till he comes and breathes life into him: and this is done according unto his pleasure; he shews this mercy to whom he will; and the only motive which he hath before him to do it in time, is because he purposed it from eternity: Now therefore the secret of God breaks into light; and though before none knew of it, and the sinner might seem to be without hope; now he comes to know that God had appointed him to be an heir of eternal life before the world was: his condition is therefore as safe as Unchangeable Love can make it.

2. It shall be well also in respect of Gods glory. It shall be no grief to him, he shall never repent that he did spare the sinner, and give

Give him a farther time of trial, but be abundantly satisfied in it; we read *Luk. 15. 9. There is joy in heaven; &c.* and there is reason why God should take content in it, because it will bring him honour; the thing will be to him *for a name, and a praise*; this will appear if we consider,

1. That which God peculiarly designs by the Gospel, is the glory of his Grace. It is true, his Justice is also greatly illustrated by it, in as much as sinners under it do aggravate their guilt, and bring the more fearful Judgments upon themselves: But the Gospel is properly a discovery of Christ in his great work of Redemption, and all this is *for the riches of the glory of his grace*, *Eph. 1. 6.* and where his grace is exalted, there God is greatly glorified, for he shall be *praised in all his Saints*, and his other perfections are magnified in and with this: his Justice in that way wherein he revealed his grace by Christ, and upon his satisfaction; his Holiness, in that he gets him an everlasting name and renown in this way, his power in that he is able to bring about this great salvation; his Wisdom in the contrivance of the way to accomplish it; hence therefore the whole treaty of the Gospel, that is held with Sinners, carries in it a demonstration of this Grace.

2. There is a more special and eminent degree

degree of glory that redounds to God by this. When a sinner who hath so obstinately withstood all endeavours that have been used with him; hath been for so many years growing harder and harder, and by all this laying in so much provocation, through the multiplied affronts that he hath offered to God, shall at last be brought over to him, and become a plant of renown in his vineyard; here are more illustrious discoveries of his grace in this one: he is a most admirable monument of mercy. As the mighty power of God is manifested, in the turning of an heart that hath been so long *glued to his idols*, so his unchangeable love is here commended: If any thing could have made him to alter his design, so much, and so long continued provocation would have done it; *Paul* therefore speaking of himself, who was brought in after he had so long set himself against Christ, speaks of it with admiration, *1 Tim.* 1. 16.

3. Hence all the dishonour that he had before done unto God, giveth lustre unto this grace. Grace is properly a free favour bestowed upon another, which he had no merit of, nor could have challenged to himself of him that bestowed it, had he not done it of his own bounty, it had never been conferred, and there are two special enhaunements of it, *viz.* the greatness of the favour bestowed, ed,

ed, and the great unworthiness of the Subject that participates in it: The more there may be said why he should not, the more there must needs appear of the condescendency of him that doth it. Now as it is sin that most of all speaks the unworthiness of men, so the more aggravations there are in it, the farther doth it set the man off from this, and renders him the more unworthy; and there can be nothing that more aggravates sin, than that a man should, under all the offers of mercy, and means of repentance, go on in a course of sin, notwithstanding all the strivings of the Spirit of God with him: this therefore is grace indeed: when Paul would exalt it, he tells us what he was before it came, *1 Tim. 1. 13. A Blasphemer, a Persecuter, and injurious.*

4. And the sinner is now made, not only a monument, but also an instrument of Gods Glory. As he before dishonoured him, so now he serves him; he bears fruit, and it is for God, and he is glorified by it, *John 15. 8.* and usually it comes to pass, that though he is born so much out of time, and so hath but a short opportunity allowed him wherein to glorify God in this life, as having spent the greatest part of his time in vanity; yet he is more deeply engaged than ordinary in Gods Service, and more strenuously endeavours to make up his lost way, and redeem the little

spot of time that is allowed him, being quickened thereunto by the thought of his former unprofitableness. What haile did *Paul* make in the work of Christ? *he laboured more than all the rest of his Fellow Apostles; and tho he came in after them, yet he came not behind the chief of them, and this is much to the glory of God.*

3. It shall be well in respect of Gods people; and those of them more especially who have been the deepest concerned for the sinner, and taken the most pains with him. For,

1. They shall now reap the fruit of all their labours. They were a long time making of sad complaints, that they had *laboured in vain*, and were ever and anon almost ready to faint and despond, and to conclude, surely there will never any good be done upon this sinner, he is even grown altogether hopeless, all our pains have been thrown away upon him: but now their labour appears not to be lost, because they are brought in unto Christ; and it is a full recompense: although a man be at a great deal of expense, and use long patience about any design that his heart is deeply engaged in, and it be a great while before it comes to take effectually, yet if at length it be compassed, the man is not frustrated; now they can heartily glorifie God in such as these are; *Gal. 1. 23,*

2. The desires of their hearts are thus accomplished, and so their Joy is fulfilled. The great thing which they longed for, and which carried them forth in all their endeavours; for which they chearfully attended all the duty lying on them; was the conversion of sinners; this was it that they waited to see, and cast many an earnest look for the discovery of it: and therefore when they do come to see it, they cannot but rejoyce, as a mother doth in a child; or a Conqueror that takes great Spoils, it makes them to forget all the labour and toil which they have bin at, and their hearts are comforted in it: all the grief which they were sinking under before, for fear of the issue, is now turned into joy; to see them brought home to Christ; *their mourning over those perishing Souls is turned into a dance.* They are glad on Gods account; that he shall have honour now by such an one; who before did nothing but dishonour him; they rejoyce on the Sinners account; that he shall now obtain salvation, and be happy for ever in the favour of God; and they rejoyce on their own account, to think what comfort they shall have in these in the day of Christ.

V S E I.

For Caution: Let none from hence presume to delay their returning unto God. There is an evil spirit in men naturally, that leads them to abuse the most precious Truths of the Word of God, and to turn the richest cordials into the most deadly poison. It may be there are some who hearing this Truth, do thereupon say in their hearts, if it be so, we will then allow our selves a while longer in our sinful courses, we will take a little more pleasure in the ways of our hearts; there is no such danger: if at last we bear fruit, we shall do well enough. If there be any that do nourish such an evil root of bitterness in them. I warn you in the name of God to beware to your selves, lest it prove your utter destruction. I am sure such inferences lead to desperate conclusions; and if men once come to settle upon them, their condition is next to hopeless; let me therefore urge these two considerations upon you.

1. Though if you do bear fruit there is no danger of your final miscarrying, yet there is great danger whether you shall bear or no; if you were as sure of true Repentance at last, as you may be that God will certainly accept of you, if you do indeed turn to him,

the hazzard would be taken off : but the Devil cheats you, by perswading you to draw unwarrantable conclusions from uncertain premises : be then advised to ballance this consideration with these two on the other hand.

1. That God only can work this change in you. If it were in your power there were the more to be pleaded : if the sinner could turn himself when he pleased, he might be the more bold, but converting grace is the gift of God, if he doth not work it in you, you can never do it for your selves : you can as easily create a world, as put grace into your own hearts, whereby you may live to Gods glory. Now God offers this grace to you, he now pleads with you about it, he saith, *to day, if you will hear his voice* ; but he hath given you no assurances that he will take your time, or wait your leisure to do this work in and for you.

2. That Gods day of grace is limited. It is true, he hath not told us how long he will lengthen it out to this or that sinner ; but in general we are assured that it hath its fixed bounds beyond which it shall not pass, and that it is to some longer, to others shorter, as it pleaseth him : he hath said, *Gen. 6. 3. My Spirit shall not always strive* ; and therefore hath given that advice to men, *Isa. 55. 6. Seek the Lord while he may be found* ; call upon

~~upon him while he is near~~; and this is a solemn consideration, which every unprofitable soul under the Ordinances ought often to entertain his thoughts withal: and particularly in the end of every Sabbath; here is one day more of my season past and gone, I am one Sabbath nearer to the end of my day of grace, which if once it comes to be past, and Gods time be over, I am then beyond all hopes of recovery, and there will be no more possibility for ever of my returning to God: and now say, what comfort can you gather from your presumed supposition, when the Assumption must be, but I am not like to return for ever.

2. If ever this work do truly pass upon you, it will then bitterly repent you of your delays; however you indulge a carnal mind, and corrupt heart with such presumptions for the present; if once the grace of God comes to be put into you, and you be indeed made fruitful, this will embitter the reflection to your thoughts: Then will you wish that you had come in to God before, complain of your selves, lament all the lost time that cannot be recovered, cry out of your selves for fools and madmen that had such a price in your hands, and had so wofully neglected it: then will you see that all your former time was lost time, and say, Oh that I had been wise; how much might I have done for God? what

treasures might I have laid up to my self for eternity, whilst I gratified my carnal lusts, *and spent money for what is not bread?* There is nothing that grieves such a soul more, than that he hath lost his youth, and strength, and vigour from the Service of God: you have laid in enough for this Repentance already, beware that you do not by your delaying provide more for it.

U S E. II.

Let this serve to encourage such as have long lived barren in Gods vineyard. It is no new device or stratagem of Satan, that great enemy of Souls, when he can no longer nourish security in mens hearts, and thereby animate them in their delaying to entertain the calls of the Gospel; but they begin to have touches upon their hearts and their consciences reflect on their conviction of their sin and danger, and rouse them up to return and seek after God in earnest, now to lay matter of discouragement before them, and drive them off from repentance, by perswading them that there is now no hope for them, it is too late, they have sinned beyond a pardon, such sinners as they have nothing now to expect but ruine, there is no mercy to be expected from God by them: and

thus from presumption he would precipitate them into desperation. This doctrine in hand, will speak a word of hope to any such, and help their sinking Souls with something to catch hold upon to support them, and to answer all their doubts and fears, which Satan and a misgiving heart are ready to oppress them withal; and there are these considerations which will stop the mouth of them all.

1. That if God were not willing to accept of you returning to him, he would not continue to call you. You say, I am afraid that if I should seek unto God he will not accept of me; but every new call that is offered to you is a contradiction, to such a suspicion: What Gods servants speak to you in his name, and according to his word, that he saith, now they say to you in his name, if after all you will hearken to his invitation, and yield yourselves up to him *you shall live, and not dye.* And they have his warrant so to say; they recieved a command to make such a Proclamation unto you. God doth not dissemble with you if he saith *return and they that do so shall live: if he incites you to come and you do come he will in no wise cast you out.* He is in earnest; he never said to the house of Jacob, *seek me in vain.*

2. That if your hearts do encline to accept of his call, it is his spirit that hath done this

this in and for you. It therefore is an evidence that his day is not done; for as long as God strives with sinners, their day is not over. Your natural inclination was to have withstood all calls and counsels for ever: it is a great work that is wrought by God in the Soul, when it is turned so as to be willing that he should do the work for it, and to desire that he would do it. If your barrenness be your burden, and you are made to groan under it, and long to be delivered from it, it takes off all reason of doubting whether God be willing or no: for it practically saith in you, that he doth desire it, and gives you reason to believe that he is doing it for you, how else came you by this?

3. That there is merit enough in the satisfaction of Christ to answer for all your sins and provocations. Though you have heightened them by your contumacy and long resistance of God; yet Justice is fully atoned, there is a compleat payment made to it by the blood of Christ, and therefore read, *Mat.* 12. 31. yea and by the accepting and pardoning of such an one as you are, there will be abundant evidence of the great extent of the vertue of these merits of his: it will appear to the glory of Christ, how wonderous a Saviour he is, what a treasure there is laid up in his satisfaction; and therein will God also be glorified.

4. That God, Angels, and good men, will greatly rejoyce at this: How glad was the Father of the *Prodigal*, that his son was returned after his profuseness? What joy is there in Heaven at the conversion of a lost Sinner? and how much are the hearts of Gods People refreshed, when they see one that hath been a long time dishonouring of God, by bringing forth the *works of darkness*, now to honour him, by bearing the fruits of Repentance? and the way for you to farther this joy is to make haste, and use no more delays; now to come over to Christ, and seek his grace. There are none that will be grieved at it; but Devils and Ungodly Men, and the more they are enraged the better. Be not then discouraged, *though you have done all this wickedness*, yet at the last give your selves up in an everlasting Covenant, to God, and bring forth the holy fruits of true Obedience unto him; and so shall your Repentance be unrepentable.

S E R M O N



SERMON XVI

THE second supposition now comes under our consideration, together with the issue proposed by the Vine-dresser. The thing that is supposed is, that after all is done, this fig-tree may not bear: he doth not know that it will, nor dares he to engage that it shall; only he offers this conclusion, *then after this thou mayst cut it down.* q. d. Excision is the last thing, let therefore all other ways be tried with it, before it comes to that, and if at last they appear to fail, that may be done after all: the tree will be where it was, and vengeance may fall upon it when it appears desperate: and there is something more in it than this, viz. he doth tacitly make a promise, that if all these essays shall come to nothing, and it still abides to be barren, he will no more interpose or speak one word for it. Our Saviours Design in this is to shew, what final impenitence under the means of
Repentance

Repentance will bring men unto : it is to ~~ve~~
 rise the truth of what he asserts, *verse 3. ex-*
cept ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Some
 sinners have more of severity used with them,
 others are the subjects of more patience, and
 thereupon they are ready to insult over these,
 and be carnally confident of themselves : but
 he lets us here see, that though some be lon-
 ger going to the pit than others, yet they
 arrive there at the last, as well as they that
 made the shortest cut unto it : and this is to
 make men afraid of withstanding the offers
 of grace that are made unto them in the day
 of it. Hence,

DOCTRINE.

If sinners continue unfruitful after utmost endea-
vours used with them, they shall perish without
remedy, without pity.

Though if they bear fruit at the last, they
 shall be spared, yet if finally they will not
 be brought unto it, but remain in their na-
 tural barrenness, they must perish in the end :
 though God hath spared them once and again
 as being loth that they should dy, yet he will
 then spare them no more.

There are three things intimated, as con-
 tained in the Doctrine.

1. That

F. That God will certainly bring destruction upon them in the end. There shall be no escaping for them; all the patience with which he hath waited upon them, and good will which he hath shewn unto them, loving and kind entreaties which he hath urged upon them, will not secure them from his wrath, or be any evidence to them that he will save and not destroy them: sinners are ready to say so; but God would have them to know and be assured of the contrary, *Psal* 50. 21, 22.

2. That their Church-priviledges will not save them. Many are ready to think that the Sanctuary shall shelter them, whatever they be, how obstinately soever they refuse to hearken to the voice of God, yet the Temple shall save them; they are in the vineyard, and no evil can come at them; this was the carnal confidence of these Jews, which our Saviour Christ would put them from entertaining, and bring them to see that impenitence would break an hole in the wall, and open a way for wrath to come upon them, and all they could challenge could not secure them, and see *Jer.* 9. 25, 26.

3. That when it comes to this, they shall then have none to plead for them. That a sinner under the Gospel may sin himself out of all pity, and beyond the prayers of the Godly: they may go on so far in their obstinacy, that even they who have been most sollicit

solicitous for them, and have many a time with tears begged of God, to spare and forbear them, shall have done on this account, leave off praying for them, and stand in the gap between an angry God and them no longer : and now the way to Gods wrath stands open, and there will be none to obstruct it ; none to stay his hand or keep him back from vengeance ; the hearts that before melted for them, shall now be hardened against them, and they shall readily comply with, and rejoyce in the Judgments of God that shall fall upon them, *Psalm. 52. 5, 6.*

This is a solemn truth, and many sinners are hard of believing it : having taken up strong persuasions about the mercy of God, as if it were inconsistent with that thus to do by them. But the Word of God is full of conviction on this account, enough to take off such vain opinions from mens minds if they will believe that. This Doctrine may be cleared and confirmed in these conclusions.

1. That God can be highly provoked with sinners in the visible Church. Indeed he is no where so incensed against any sinners as those that sin there : all that belong thither are not such as he hath set his heart upon : he hates sin wherever he sees it ; his pure eyes cannot behold it without detestation, and it is most grievous to him where he hath used the most of means to draw men from it, and

and where he expects holiness. The Church is a company of holy ones, by seperation for God, by profession, and by external denomination; Holiness is that which God calls for, and they are devoted unto: if therefore they be otherwise, he must needs take it in all part, and it must stir up his jealousy against them. The Scripture affords us many instances of Gods anger that hath been stirred against such as have been taken near unto him, and born the name of his people upon them, how often was God angry with Israel in the Wilderness, and in the land of Canaan? how many ways did he take to testify his displeasure against them? hence that, *Jer. 11. 15. What hath my beloved to do in my house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many.* If men in covenant with God, will live in sin, he will not bear it, nay the very Covenant threatning is out against them? and that is a witness of his Displeasure.

2. That nothing is more provoking to God than for these to persist in wickedness; notwithstanding all means possible used to reclaim them. Although all sin be provoking to him, yet obstinacy and unreclaimableness in it renders them that commit it most of all displeasing in his sight: and this is aggravated proportionally to the means that have been used with them; and that is accumu-
lated

lated; when these have been carried on after signal tokens of his anger, and eminent deliverances out of his hand, and renewed endeavours with fresh and encreased importunity urged upon them. Though men sin, yet if they will be reclaimed, by afflictions, by deliverances, by earnest calls and entreaties, God can readily pass by all this provocation, and be atoned to the sinner; but if he harden his heart under all this, and goes on still in his loose and sinful ways, not giving ear to the voice of God: if he remains unchanged, impenitent, and in his natural state; this carrieth the greatest offence in it; this is the complaint of Christ, *Matth. 23. 37. How oft would I have gathered thy children, but ye would not.* This was it that made Gods anger to burn so hotly against Jerusalem; *2. Chro. 36. 19: 16.* This is his very quarrel with them, *Amos. 4. 6. Yet have ye not returned to the faith the Lord.*

3. That there are fearful threatnings out against the finally impenitent. The truth is, all the terrible menaces of the Word of God are most properly belonging to such as these. It is not this or that sin in it self, that holds the sinner bound under the curse; for, let it have been what it will, of what sort or degree soever, yet if men do truly repent of it, that will turn away the wrath of God, and take off the threatening from them:

them: but it is impenitency added to it; that continues a man under the curse, and perseverance in it, that makes his case to be remediless. When God sent his Prophets with the most fearful denunciations of wrath, they were still to add invitations to repentance, and make encouraging promises of mercy in case they did prevail: but they were withal to assure them, that if they did not return those judgments should take place upon them without avoidance; *Isa. 1. 19, 20. Psal. 7. 10, 11.* This is it which makes *iniquity to be their ruine.* If they had *hearkened to the voice of God, believed his word, and obeyed his counsels, he would have turned his hand upon their enemies, and saved them;* but because they would not so do, therefore did his wrath fall upon them.

4. That God hath fixt a time how long he will wait for the sinners conversion, before he puts these threatnings of his in execution. God is pleased first to threaten before he strikes the blow: and because this is one of the courses which he useth with men to perswade them to return, he gives them time afterwards, and calls aloud to them to consider and amend: Now this is Gods long sufferance; and the duration of it depends upon his meer pleasure. But though we cannot tell how long it shall be, yet he knows for he hath appointed it in his holy purpose:

he tells how long the old world shall be waited on, Gen. 6. 3. thus long he will tarry no longer : he hath set every sinner a day, and his call is limited unto it : it saith, *to day, while it is called to day : i. e. whilst it is a day of grace and patience ;* and because it is a day, it therefore hath its bounds, and will have an end ; it will not continue always : God can bear a great while, but he will not do so for ever : he can, as patient as he is, *be weary with forbearing,* and he will so be when that day is run out.

5. That if the sinner withstands Gods time, he will unavoidably bring these threatenings upon his own head. Though Gods menaces be conditional, yet they are real : he never intended them merely for the affrighting of man, but is resolved that they shall take place according to the true purport of them. He saith indeed, if the sinner repents, he will repent too ; but he also saith, that if he do not, then his eye shall neither *pity nor spare,* nor will he have mercy any more upon them. He would have sinners to fly from these threatenings in time, whilst there is a city of refuge standing open to give them shelter, but if they do not he will rain that horrible tempest upon them and though it may seem to be long first, yet it shall be no longer then the appointed time : and when the day of patience is at an end, the

the day of vengeance will tread upon the heels of it, and shall have no mercy in it, *Isa. 27. 11.* *He that made them will have no mercy on them, and he that formed them, will shew them no favour.* So. *Ezek. 7: 2: 3. 4.* This is a day of revenges, and God will then make all his words good, and sinners experience shall thoroughly convince them, that he did not speak in jest, though before they laughed at all forewarnings, and seemed to deride the day of the Lord.

6. That Gods holiness and justice do stand engaged for the sinners destruction. It must therefore needs be: this renders it unavoidable. Sinners please themselves with dreams of mercy; as if there were no other Attribute in God but that, concerned about them: but know it, that if ever any sinner be saved, *mercy and truth must meet together, righteousness and peace must kiss each other.* Final Barrenness cuts off the man from saving mercy, because Holiness and Justice do forbid it. Holiness, is God bound for his own Glory, so as not to bear any thing that stands in the way of it; now as it is Gods glory to forgive the penitent, so it would be a wrong to it to spare the obstinate; he would lose the glory of his Truth in his threatnings, yea the glory of his having honour by the creature that will pay him none. Justice also stands in the way; for every sinner is devoted

Devoted to destruction by the Law-threatening, to which the Justice of God stands obliged; there is but one way to save this Justice in the justifying of a sinner; and that is by the imputation of the Righteousness of Christ to him, which must be according to the condition of the New-Covenant, which the sinner by his obstinacy keeps himself from, and therefore hath no claim to the privileges of it; and so he must needs perish.

7. That gracious Souls desire the sinners salvation only in Gods way. It is true, every sanctified soul hath a love to the souls of others, and earnestly desires that they may be saved. and is willing to do all that he can for the procuring of it: but yet grace hath taught every one that truly fears God, to subordinate all his aims, ends, desires to the glory of God, which is the ultimate end that all ought to propound to themselves in every thing. These desires are therefore limited, as to the way for the accomplishment of them, he would have the sinner to be saved; but he would not have him to be saved in his sins; for that would bring dishonour to God; but he would have him to be converted and changed, sanctified and made fruitful, and so to be saved; because this is the only way in which God brings men to salvation, so as to be glorified in it: and for this end it is that he doth so much labour for his conversion, and pray so earnestly unto God; that

that he would change his heart : how often is Paul begging for grace in behalf of those whom he writes unto ?

8. That these, if they find their last essays frustrated, are apt to grow discouraged. There is indeed too much pronitide in the hearts of Gods people to sink under discouragement when they ought not, and they are fain to labour with their own misgiving spirits to animate them : but it is of God many times, and yet very righteously, and in anger to sinners, to take away all hopes from his Servants : and though he doth not say in so many words, as he did to the Prophet Jeremiah, *pray no more for them, for I will not hear thee*, yet he sometimes providentially stops their mouths, and they look upon such as beyond their hope, and thereupon all their endeavours with and for them begin to grow languid and faint.

9. And when it comes to this, there is now nothing to hold back Gods hand of revenge from falling upon such sinners. Whilst these stood in the gap, they kept off the Judgments of God, at least from cutting down and rooting out those sinners ; whilst they were earnest with God to spare and try them, his hands were held back, and he knew not how to destroy them : but now
God

God hath, by silencing of them, made a way to his Wrath, the breach stands wide open; and there is nothing in view but ruine, ready to fall upon sinners; all means having been tried to the utmost, and nothing remaining un-essayed, all patience having been vilely abused and trampled upon, all hopes are now quite gone, and what shall God do with them now but cut them down?

U S E I.

For Information in three particulars;

I. This Doctrine certifies us that gracious souls will be satisfied in the Judgments which God will execute upon impenitent sinners: There will be so much of equity in Gods proceedings against them, so much inexcusable-ness in them, who have had so great patience, and so many endeavours afforded unto them, that they will have nothing at all to object against it: and indeed though it cannot but grieve the souls of Gods children at present, to see how wilfully unreclaimable sinners dy, yet they cannot but justifie God in his righteous Judgments upon them. The vine-dresser cannot but say, his Lord may well cut down such a fig-tree, as no means will make

to bear fruit. How much more then shall they for ever acquiesce in the final doom that shall be past in the great day, when their grace shall be perfect, and Gods Righteousness shall be openly declared? and it ought to be an awful consideration for sinners to think of, that if you now *will dy*, you shall have no pity then, but all the Redeemed of Christ will, in that day, *Rejoyce in the Judgment.*

2. That God will be no loser by all the long suffering which he extends unto men, though they are not made better by it. This is the force of this plea: It can be but cut down at last, and that will be a sufficient declaration of righteous revenge; and this tells us, that God both can and will proportion the miseries of ungodly men, to the cost that hath been laid out upon, and despised by them; which may convince all unregenerate sinners under the Gospel, upon what an awful account they stand, and are spared from time to time, if they shall at the last miss of eternal life.

3. This then shews us the desperate madness of secure sinners, that have been let alone after threatnings; and how many such are there among us, who have been under the

the sentence of destruction; Gods hand hath been up, ready to fall upon them, but it hath been held back, the Judgment was stayed, and they escaped; they now say with *Agag*, *The bitterness of death is past*; and hereupon they grew more secure, and careless of themselves, and unmindful of the great concerns of their souls than ever; they forget their promises, and abide contentedly in their former unfruitfulness, as if *they had been delivered to do all these abominations*! Is this the improvement which you make of a time of trial? *Oh foolish and unwise*! and do you think thus to escape the wrath of God? Had you your lives given you for a prey for this? *Will it not be bitterness in the latter end*? know it, God will not thus have done with you, he hath an account that he will shortly call you unto, and a sad one it will be for you.

Hence,

U S E II.

Let it be for a word of solemn warning to all such. All you that abide in your sins, notwithstanding God hath given you such fair opportunities, and such awakenings calls to Repentance; you have been spared at this time,

time, and at that time, and you promise yourselves that it shall ever be so: but let me have leave to enter this caution; be assured that there will a time come, when you shall not be spared any more; cutting down is like to be the end of all such as you are: *God is not slack, as men count slackness*, he is willing that you should repent and escape his fury; but he knows that he can cut you down when he will; and if you will in no other way glorifie him, it will unavoidably come to this at the last: and if you are resolved in your way, and if you will not be perswaded to take the warning, and accept the counsel given you, let me only entreat you to remember it one day that you have been seriously and solemnly told of it before-hand, but you would not lay it to heart.

U S E III.

This may also be for a word of Trial unto *spare sinners*. If the case stands thus with you that you are now upon the Trial with God, and if upon it you do not bring forth fruit to his praise, you must for all this be destroyed, it loudly calls upon you, seriously and throughly to examine your selves, under which of these *Hypotheses* you now stand.

The

The difference is vastly great, if you bear fruit well, but if not, you see what is your doom; and doth not this call for your reflection upon this? doth it not say, that it infinitely concerns you to know what improvement you have made of this mercy of God that hath spared you? will it not be a fearful thing to be mistaken here? and that you may be guided aright in this self-examination, take diligent notice of the condition expressed in the *Text*; it doth not say if you grow worse, and fall into grosser abominations than before you indulged your selves in; if you grow more lewd, and more debauched; which yet it is to be feared, is the woful effect of sparing mercies upon too many unhappy creatures, whom their deliverances have emboldened in sin; but if you bear not: If the Judgment found you unconverted, and leaves you unconverted, and unconcerned about your conversion, this is sufficient to bring you under the sentence, whatsoever reformation it may work in your outward conversation, however you may abstain from some sins which you formerly lived in, and do some duties which heretofore you lived in the neglect of, yet if there be not a thorough change wrought in you, if you be not effectually brought home to God by it, it is still a truth as to you, that you do not bear fruit?

fruit : God reposes you barren still : the end of Gods trial is not attained in you, and you ly open to the doom that is here declared. This then is the question that you are to put to your own souls, Am I converted to God ? am I brought in to Jesus Christ ? by a living faith ? am I thoroughly turned from sin unto God ? *be not deceived, for God is not mocked ?* read the sentence you are under, and tremble at it, *Mat. 3. 10. Now the Ax is laid to the root of the trees ; therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

U S E IV.

Let it be for a loud call to barren souls in the vineyard, at last to bear fruit, and to make haste so to do : It is God only who can make this word powerful, and work that great change in you : but yet there is a calling of the *dead to awake* by Gospel invitations : and this Truth speaks very loudly to all those that have been a great while unprofitable, and on whom uncountable means of grace have seemed to have been thrown away ; who have been wearying out of a great deal of Gods forbearance ; and yet he affords them one season more, one opportunity lon-

ger ; let this Doctrine awaken you to a diligent improving of it, to be no longer barren ; *let the time past suffice you*, to have lived in sin and vanity : as you would escape this fearful destruction, use all possible endeavours, and go to God in Christs Name with the greatest importunity begging of him that he will make you fruitful : and that I may press this Exhortation upon you forcibly, let me offer these things to your serious consideration.

1. Think how long you have already resisted the Spirit of God. Although he hath not told sinners how long he will tarry waiting upon them ; yet he hath said that it shall not be al ways, and that is enough to put upon you thoughtfulness : it is good to compute the time that you have had, and is past by you, so many years forbearance, so many strivings with your Souls in them, so often addresses made to you with the tenders of his Grace ; all this saith unto the sinner, that his day is wearing up apace, and that it will not be long ere it be spent. And there is reason also to fear, that the more of means have bin used with you, and the more earnest persuasions have been pressed upon you, the shorter time you are like to have ; because such urgent strivings and importunities, are

Declaration that God is in haste

2. Think what an Holy God you have to do withal. Never cheat your selves into a vain opinion, that because he is a merciful God, therefore you shall do well enough with him; how many thousands are there now rueing that folly in the place of Torments? you are in all these transactions concerned with a God who will not always be trifled with; and who will not suffer sinners to tread upon his honour, or cast contempt upon his glory, without calling of them to a severe account for it, and making them to feel the smart of it; if therefore you will not serve him, he will honour himself upon you; but how little will that be to your comfort.

Hence;

3. Affect your hearts by thinking how fearful this destruction must needs be. How dismal a thing it will be for you, after all this to fall into the hands of revenging justice. Think, if I bear no fruit, I must needs be destroyed at last, and will not all these things be then remembered against me? and how much better would it then have been, if I had been cut of by such a stroke that fell upon me, and I was endangered by? had I not
better

better have perished so many years ago, than to have been let alive to fill up so much more wrath, and lay in so many heavier aggravations of guilt, to make my woes so much the more intollerable.

4. Know it that if now at last you will hearken to the voice of God, and accept of his grace to make you fruitful, all shall be well still. if yet before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, you will give glory to God, you may escape this fearful sentence. This very last threatning which I am now urging upon you, is sent to you in mercy, and I am commaded to tell you of it before it comes to pass; that so you may have, at least, one more advantage presented before you to escape it: and oh let it not be despised if you neglected the last sabbaths encouragement, yet if you will entertain this sabbaths terror, and be perswaded to repent and return to God, it is not yet too late for you to escape the curse, and obtain the blessing.

5. Think this may be the last call that ever shall be sent unto you, there will be a last, I am sure to every impenitent sinner, and it is not improbable but this may be so to some or other on whom it is now urged; There have past very few Sabbath of late, in which
some

Some have not come to the House of God to hear their last : what need have you then to take heed what entertainment you give hereunto, you are figtrees in the vineyard you have had many a three years liberty of it, God hath sought fruit of you, and found none, he hath bin greatly provoked hereby and brought many Judgments in the midst of you, and yet hath by the importunity of his servants been prevailed with to deferr & tarry a litle longer; but he tells you he is in hast, his word saith so, his providence saith so, oh do not then loyter any longer, the matter is of infinite concernment, & it will in a few days more be determined, you have the choice now before you, and you must make it speedily: either *conversion or destruction*, and the Lord make you wise in it, for yet a little while, and according as your choice is, so must it be with you through all eternity;

$$\frac{a}{o}$$

F I N I S.

311. J. M. Smith

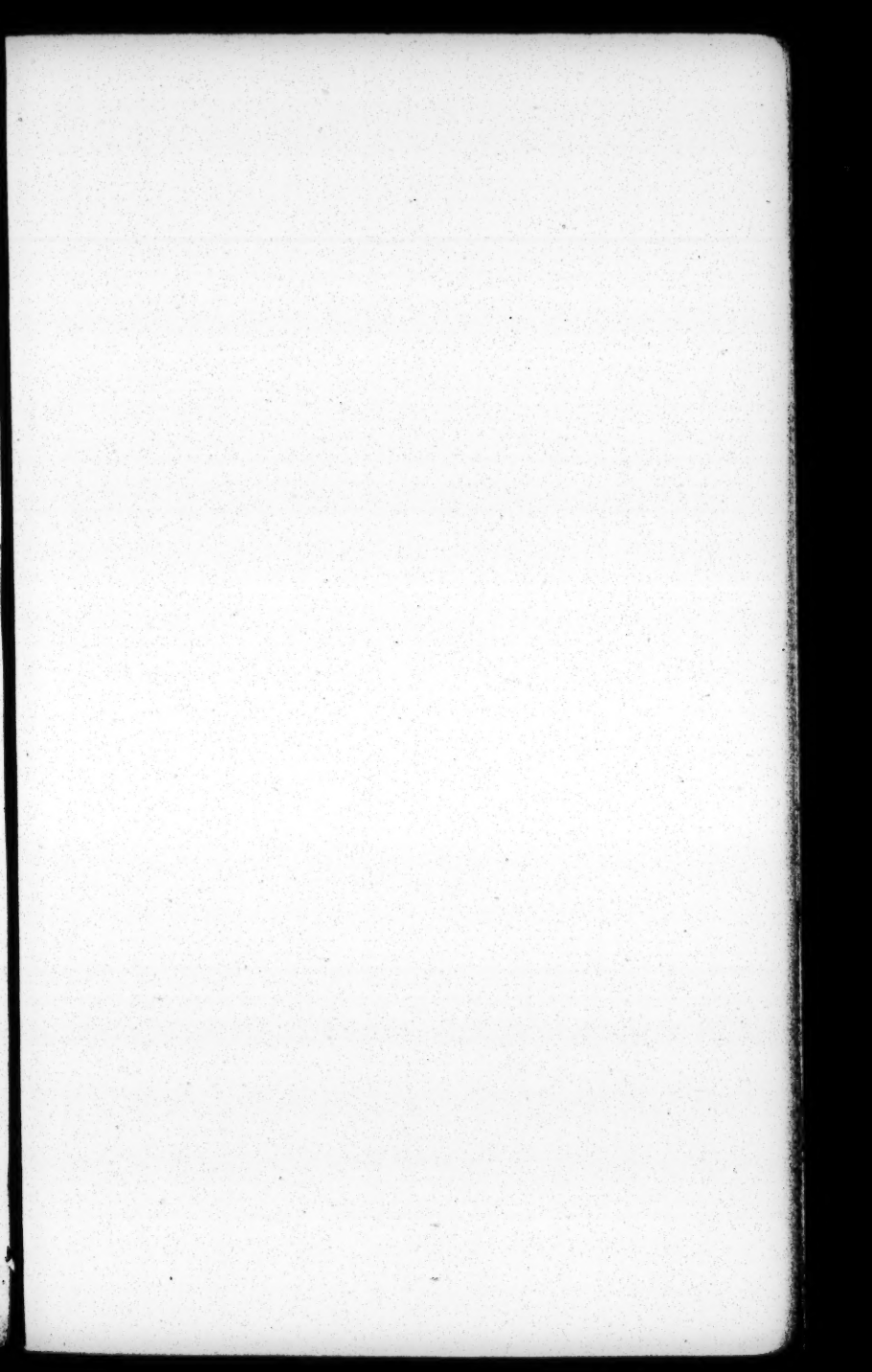
1/16/59

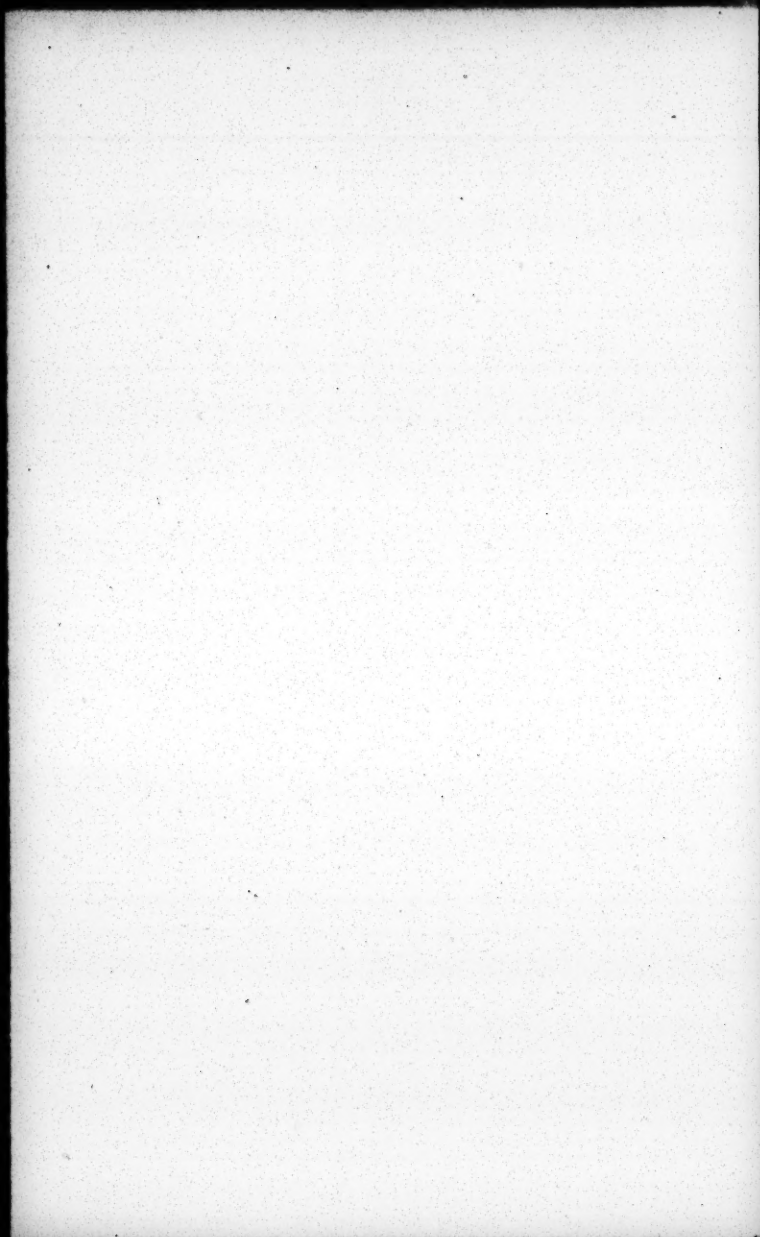
20

1/16/59

Ritter's book
77.

6-1





*AC6.W6618.691b

THE HOUGHTON LIBRARY

*41-790